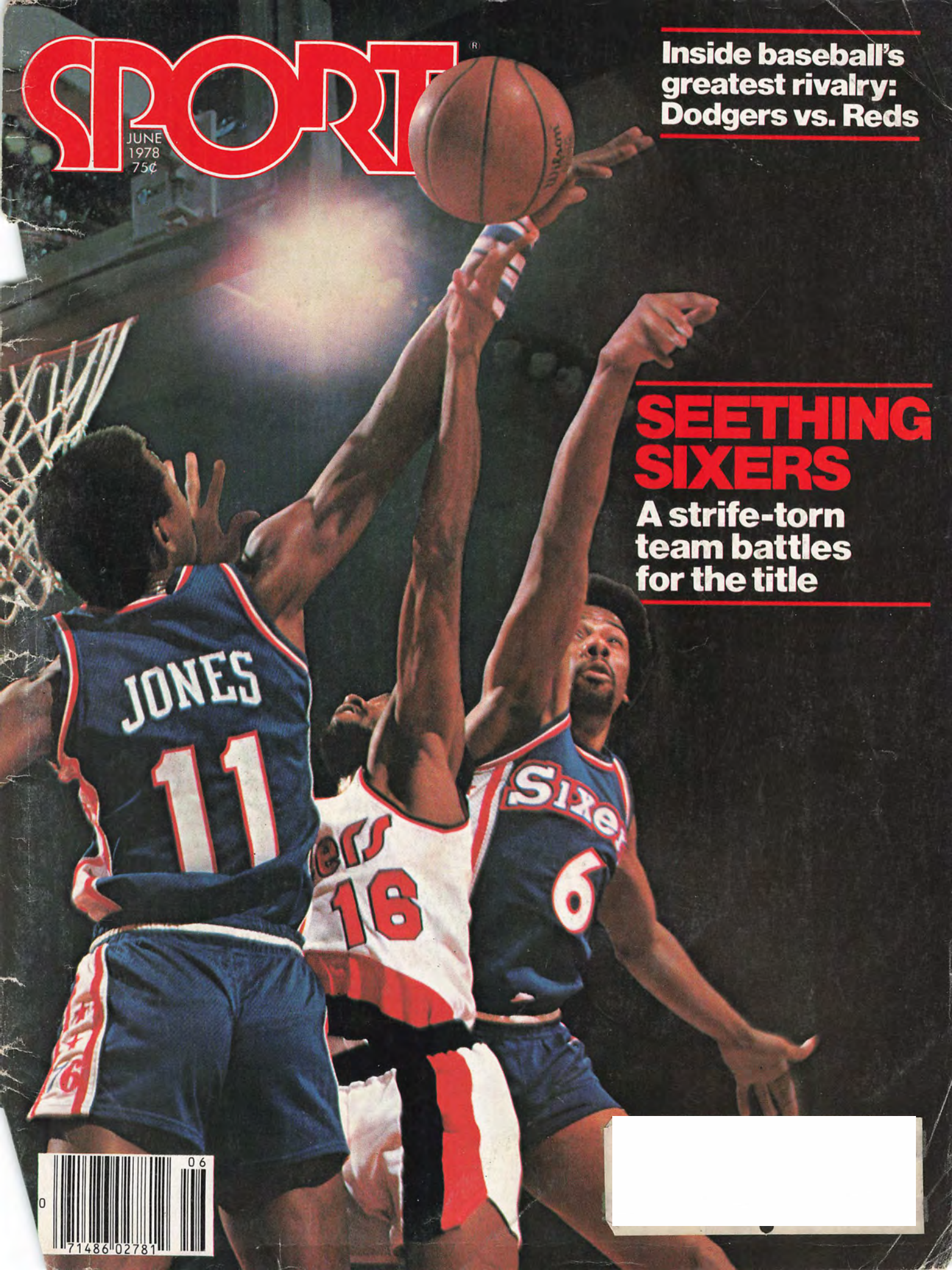

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A strife-torn team battles for the title
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SPORT®

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Coach Billy Cunningham was supposed to bring harmony to the strife-torn 76ers this season, but the NBA's most talented group of individuals went into the playoffs still bickering, backstabbing and battling among themselves

BY SAMANTHA STEVENSON

34 **Mr. Clean does Denver's dirty work**

While many NBA stars regard every game as an anything-goes war, Bobby Jones of the Nuggets plays your basic within-the-rules basketball as he blocks shots, steals, rebounds, scores and goes all-out on D. "Jones may be," say experts, "the best overall forward in the league"

BY WOODROW PAIGE JR.

44 **"It's not a one-on-one game"**

At a time when selfishness runs rampant in the NBA, Portland guard Johnny Davis willingly sacrifices his point totals and game time to play a "role" on the defending champion Trail Blazers. "The bottom line," Davis says, "is to win"

BY ROGER DIRECTOR

55 **This gringo's high on jai-alai**

Kirby Prater is one of a handful of Americans competing in the fast-paced, fast-growing sport dominated by Basques who run two miles in each night's play. They stay in shape by smoking, drinking—and exercising as little as possible

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66 **Inside baseball's greatest rivalry: Dodgers vs. Reds**

When these teams collide, the players on both sides are often stirred to magnificent heights. Here the players discuss those tension-filled confrontations. Says the Dodgers' Steve Garvey: "You can never let up against the Reds." Says the Reds' Pete Rose: "I always bust my ass to win, but with the Dodgers I do it a little more"

BY MAURY ALLEN

72 **What makes Thurman run?**

Why "the guts of the Yankees," Thurman Munson, is often boorish, rude and outright offensive may stem from his having a father whom he could never please and from the catcher's desperate craving for national recognition

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80 **Don Sutton does not bleed Dodger Blue**

Impatient, cocky and a stubborn individualist, Sutton has often been in conflict with his team over the last 12 years. But over the last five years, he has been the winningest pitcher in the National League

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88 **"Oh, man, we blew it again"**

Said the Rams' veteran All-Pro linebacker after, one more time, his team failed in the NFL playoffs. "I'm not putting the blame completely on [quarterback] Pat Haden," Robertson says in his diary of last season, "but I think that if Joe Namath had been healthy, Joe could've done it"

BY ISIAH ROBERTSON WITH LYNDA HUEY

104 **Indy on his mind**

The fierce competition on auto racing's Championship Trail is all geared toward the Indy 500, says two-time winner Johnny Rutherford—whose goal is to match A. J. Foyt's four visits to victory lane

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Cover Photographed by Hank de Lespinasse

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LETTERS TO SPORT

BRAVOS FOR SPARKY AND THE GOOSE

I enjoyed reading "Sparky and the Goose" in your April issue. The article was interesting and informative. I had never fully realized what goes on in the mind of a relief pitcher during a game. I had a notion that the truly outstanding relief pitchers possess a special mental attitude. My beliefs have been confirmed. Thank you, SPORT and Harry Stein, for a wonderful presentation.

Louis D'Emilio
Staten Island, N.Y.

Your article on Lyle and Gossage is perhaps the best I have ever read on relief pitchers. It contains everything a great article has—humor, frankness, depth and Harry Stein as the author.

Steven Lazan
Fort Lee, N.J.

FREE AGENT FEEDBACK

I enjoyed Richard O'Connor's piece, "Will free agents kill baseball?" (April). The standardization of the outfield dimensions in all ballparks should be given serious thought as a future rule change. There would be fewer ground rules and more "honest" statistics.

Bernard H. Sundberg
North Weymouth, Mass.

SOCCER SUPPORTERS

Thank you for the two articles, "Soccer and the ghost of Christmas Yet to Come" and "The bizarre, brawling Cosmos," in the April issue. Both gave insight into the sport, its players and management, and what the future holds for soccer in the U.S.A.

W. Robert Marshall
Depew, N.Y.

I was delighted to read Jerry Izenberg's article on the North American Soccer League. It provided readers with some inside "scoops" not often available to the public.

The NASL has struggled for a number of years. Although it may have suffered from poor management in the past, it now seems blessed with a new breed of team owners. In developing a strategic, long-range plan for the league, the owners considered not only themselves, but also their fans and their players. I was retained as a consultant to assist them and I believe this planning has helped to lay the groundwork for a successful league.

Malcom B. Bund
Washington, D.C.

BACK SEAT FOR BUTCH

Phil Singerman's article on Butch Lee, ("When it's show time, Butch Lee puts the ball in the basket," April), was very interesting and well-written. But I disagree with Al McGuire's statement that Lee will be the first guard taken in the pro draft: Phil Ford of North Carolina will be.

James D. Taylor
Richmond, Va.

GOOD DOES GOOD

Thank you for printing Paul Good's excellent article on the

(Continued on page 7)

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LETTERS TO SPORT

(Continued from page 4)

NCAA ("Tarkanian vs. the NCAA: Behind the Congressional probe that may revamp college sports," March). The lack of due process in hearings and the questionable investigative techniques and the subsequent damage that they have caused, were not surprising to me. If the integrity of sports is to be preserved, the print media must fulfill its constitutional role of informing the people.

Jonathan Wetchler
Buffalo, N.Y.

Hooray for Jerry Tarkanian! He merits a great deal of respect for standing up to the NCAA. If the NCAA is so intent on putting an end to wrongdoings in college athletics, why doesn't it put an end to its own deception? Considering the tactics it has employed, I find it hard to trust any ruling it might make against a school. The NCAA should clean up its act.

Karen Devlin
Pittsburgh, Pa.

At last the NCAA has met its match. Jerry Tarkanian is the "Robin Hood" of college athletics.

Bill V. Jones
Arcadia, Calif.

SPOILSPORT TALK

Your award, "The Esprit De Corps Cup," in the SPORT Talk section of your March issue ("Spoilsports of 1977") was given to the wrong people. You blame John Hannah and Leon Gray for the Patriots' losses to the Browns and Jets, when the real reason for the losses was defense. Any football team that gives up 30 points doesn't deserve to win a game. Find someone worthy of the award.

Paul Montella
Richmond Hill, N.Y.

I nominate SPORT for the "Least Class Shown by a Sports Magazine" award for printing the Spoilsports article. Though your intentions were laudable, many of the awards came off as nothing more than cheap shots. Come on! This article is beneath you.

Joe Campbell
Griffith, Ind.

My nomination for a spoilsport is O.J. Simpson for trying to imitate a sportscaster on TV. He can't stand still for two seconds and is such a mushmouth that no one can understand him when he speaks. Why not team him with Phyllis George? One doesn't know a damn thing about sports and the other can't talk. But of course, Howard Cosell has both these qualities rolled up in one.

Candy Crocker
Falmouth, Mass.

I fully agree with your Spoilsport citation to one of the worst people on television, Phyllis George. I also agree with the "Sore Losers of 1977" choices. I used to be a loyal Ohio State football fan but I enjoy seeing them get beat by Michigan because I like to watch coach Woody Hayes make a jerk out of himself. I think it is time Ohio State does something about the childish fits he throws.

Blake Delgouffre
Address withheld

Congratulations for giving Phyllis George and Howard Cosell the awards they richly deserve. It's nice to know I'm not alone in my opinions.

Ruth Ann Friedlander
Citrus Heights, Calif.

The Spoilsport of the year is Sidney Wicks. He turned two franchises around: Boston went straight to the bottom and Portland went straight to the top.

R.E. Watkins
Portland, Ore.

A spoilsport award should go to Rick Barry for his constant protesting. Runnerups: Jim Chones, Charlie Scott and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Doug Fulton
Jefferson, Ohio

Congratulations on another "bonehead" play. I refer to your "Spoilsports" awards of 1977, particularly the piece on Kermit Washington. Can't you leave the man in peace? He's paid his fine, made his apologies. Anyone who has talked to Kermit or had the chance to hear him speak cannot help but be impressed with his sincerity.

R. Hannon
Somerville, Mass.

LUCAS LOVERS

Your article on Portland forward Maurice Lucas, "I don't want anybody in my territory," (March) was excellent. Lucas plays with such intensity that he is respected and envied by other players in the league. He is also a man searching for peace within, through such things as Transcendental Meditation. Pound for pound, inch for inch, Maurice Lucas is the best power forward in the NBA.

Thanks for your top-notch reporting.

James Hamilton
Niagara Falls, N.Y.

I liked Maurice Lucas a little; after I read your article, I liked him a lot.

Jim McClure
Richmond, Ind.

LUKE REBUKE

In April's SPORT Talk, you have a story called "The Violent World of Maurice Lucas." Lucas says that Dan Issel of the Nuggets can dish out punishment but can't take it. Lucas calls him a crybaby. Lucas should have ranked himself in that category. I have seen him punch Issel and Bobby Jones in the kidneys when they are backing in on him. If I were a referee, Maurice Lucas would be out of the game.

Steven Clark
Aurora, Col.

FANS DIVIDE ON GUIDE

"A fan's guide to pro basketball" (Feb.-April) was one of the most interesting and informative series of articles yet produced by SPORT. Writer Charley Rosen is to be congratulated.

Mitchell Zucker
New City, N.Y.

Was Charley Rosen on a Rocky Mountain high when he rated Denver's Bobby Jones over Maurice Lucas in "Rating the tall forwards"?

Walt Wilson
Aberdeen, Wash.

Charley Rosen's article, "A fan's guide to pro basketball: part 2," in your March issue is a total disgrace to your fine magazine.

I can't express how poorly Rosen judges talent. If New York's Jim Cleamons is a better guard than Randy Smith, George Gervin, Lionel Hollins, Pete Maravich, Walt Frazier, etc., then the Knicks should have finished in first place instead of playing .500 ball.

In future stories about basketball, please let Mr. Rosen sit on the bench!

Joe Kanner
Yonkers, N.Y.

Your article was pathetic. Pete Maravich is far better than Jim Cleamons.

Paul Brophy
Brooklyn, N.Y.

I enjoyed Charley Rosen's article. However, his system for rating the guards reeks. How about starting over, with Jo Jo White on top again?

Bruce A. Bourne
Phoenix, Ariz.

When did SPORT become a science-fiction publication? After reading Charley Rosen's article I began to wonder where he got the figures used to rate various players. It will be a pleasure to read more of his material in the funny paper.

Don Willman
Columbus, Ohio

Letters To SPORT
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SPORT TALK

ASK BILL LEE

Boston Red Sox pitcher Bill Lee responds to this month's question: *Why are a ballfield's boundaries called "foul lines" if they are in fair territory?*

"It all depends on which side you're on. If we played the game off the field—in the stands—they would be called 'fair lines.' Since we currently play mainly on the field, they're called 'foul lines.' "

Send your questions to Bill Lee in care of SPORT, 641 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022. We'll print more of his responses next month.

WORKINGMAN'S COACH

"Well, see, I call my players dogs," Boston Bruin coach Don Cherry says, "and there's no higher compliment in the world that I can pay another human being—because I love dogs, more than I do most human beings! Now, I have a dog called a pit bull terrier. Her name is Blue. Remember the dog Patton had in that movie? They're the fighting dogs people throw into the 'pit' to fight, and still do. They're loving dogs, but, boy, can they fight! So I call my players bull terriers, and I call Stanley [Jonathan] 'Blue.' After a fight with a Buffalo player was over, he came to the bench and all the guys said, 'Way to go, Blue!' "

Brash, tough and outspoken, Cherry is the moving force behind the big, bad Bruins—a team that beats you with hustle, a brutal checking game and—sometimes—fists. "I'll say it right now: We're the toughest team in the league," says Cherry. To back this up, Cherry's starting forward line consists of Peter McNab, Terry O'Reilly and John Wensink. "Good big guys, fine brawnful lads," Cherry says. "Six hundred pounds of muscle there. It looks good on the ice, you know?"

But he's not a Patton-like leader who frightens his troops into becoming fighting men. Instead, he's more like the *foreman* of the Bruins—a squad dubbed the "workingman's team" because of their hard-working style.

"We're all like brothers here," says Cherry. "I treat the players the way I would have liked to get treated when *I* was a player. So I go to bars and have a few beers with the guys and have a good time. Once, the night before a game!"

This is heresy to NHL coaches, but Cherry doesn't think twice about being unorthodox. "My players have never been fined, I've never checked their beds, or had curfews. I trust them implicitly. All I ask is they be in good shape."

Cherry got his perspectives in a 16-year minor-league playing career in nine cities—in outposts like Spokane, Tulsa and Three Rivers, Quebec. "I had an awful lot of good teachers of coaching down in the minors—to teach me what *not* to do. F'rinstance, I'd be there having a few beers the night before a game with a player, and he'd be a great guy. The next day, he would be made coach, and all of a sudden the guy turns into a rat! Telling me not to drink any more beer! I'll tell you: Some coaches get carried away with themselves. I think it's an overrated profession."

—Len Albin



SUPERSTAT

The current 136-page Philadelphia 76ers press guide is so packed with meaty statistics and basketball trivia that it is worthy of a slot in the Library of Congress. Along with its mundane statistics—scoring and rebounding—it contains such esoterica as the results of each of the Sixers' opening taps last season, each NBA player's draft round, the average length of games for each club, a list of each NBA player's technical fouls and amount fined, and the matchups in all of last season's NBA fights. The author of the guide is Harvey Pollack, the Sixers' publicity director. Last year, in his meticulous but maniacal pursuit of statistical minutiae, he burned out three pocket calculators.

Pollack supplements his figurework with a memory that goes back to the day 32 years ago that he first became a professional basketball statistician. When asked which player was once chased across a basketball court with a chair, he replied in a brusque voice reminiscent of a savvy New York cabdriver: "Well, I didn't keep a category of guys chasing guys with chairs, but years ago Guy Rodgers once picked up a chair. Not to *chase* a guy, but to *protect* himself."

Though the NBA frowns on Harvey for keeping track of violence, he has nevertheless pioneered the use of several important statistical categories. "This year, for the first time, the league itself is keepin' individual turnovers," he said. "I've been after them for years, and my rules are the ones the league's adopted: Everything is charged to a player except five-, ten- or 24-second violations." Harvey's informal guidelines for fights are simpler: "At least one punch has to be thrown" before he will consider a confrontation worthy of the "fight" category.

Since 1949, the NBA has gradually followed Harvey's lead by officially keeping statistics of minutes played, assists, rebounds, steals, blocked shots and offensive rebounds. "What *really* bugged me," Pollack said, "was when the ABA was keepin' steals and we weren't."

The next advance Harvey proposes is making statistics uniform around the NBA. "If a hometown statistician misses an assist on a visiting guy, what's he care? You know, never in NBA history—not once—have they had a meeting of all the statisticians. It doesn't make sense with all the money they spend, not to have one big meeting."

(Continued on page 52)

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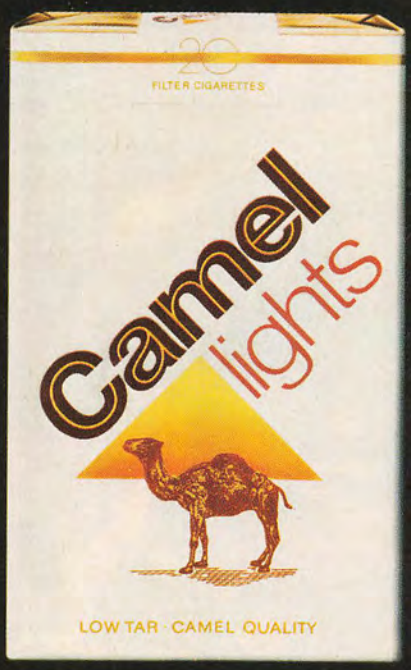
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Coach Billy Cunningham was supposed to bring harmony to the strife-torn 76ers this season, but the NBA's most talented group of individuals went into the playoffs still bickering, backstabbing and battling among themselves

The seething

by SAMANTHA STEVENSON

It was racehorse basketball at its finest in the Philadelphia Spectrum. The 76ers were going against their toughest Eastern Conference opponent, the San Antonio Spurs, who employ the same run-and-gun style. But on this night last February, despite the absence of forward Julius Erving (sidelined with phlebitis), the Spurs couldn't keep up with the swift, powerful Sixers. Led by 6-foot-8, 240-pound team captain George McGinnis (36 points) and lithe guard Doug Collins (24 points), the 76ers scored a 125-116 victory.

The important win, though, was



Sixers

not without the internal controversy that had plagued the 76ers through the previous National Basketball Association season and playoffs under former coach Gene Shue. For even as McGinnis and Collins were swelling their scoring averages against the Spurs, they were also bickering. The trouble stemmed from an unremitting Sixer



Cunningham (below) often may think there aren't enough balls to satisfy his point-hungry players, such as (l-r) Free, Collins and McGinnis.

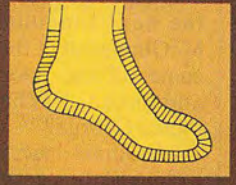

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Sixers

syndrome: the pass that never left a teammate's hand. Collins, open on a fastbreak, was convinced that McGinnis had refused to hit him with the ball. As the team fell back on defense, the angry Collins yelled at big George: "Pass the f---in' ball, will ya!"

McGinnis glared at Collins and said, "Don't embarrass me like that, man."

Collins, still fuming, wouldn't let it go. He complained to coach Billy Cunningham on the Sixer bench, and during the next timeout Cunningham took McGinnis out of the game. As McGinnis came off the floor, Cunningham rose and asked, "What're you doing out there, George?"

McGinnis said, "F--- you, and f--- Collins!" then grabbed a towel and took a seat at the far end of the bench.

Cunningham, hands on hips, stared after his power forward for a moment, then wordlessly sat down.

That was not how it was supposed to go for the 76ers after team owner F. Eugene (Fitz) Dixon Jr. fired Shue on November 4, 1977 and replaced him with Cunningham. Although the immediate pretext for Shue's dismissal was the team's shaky start of two wins and four losses, there was more to the coaching change than that.

Under Shue, the 76ers thought only about scoring. They ignored such crucial aspects of the game as team defense and high-percentage-shot playmaking. But the 76ers had so much talent that—almost in spite of themselves—they frequently rallied from large deficits and won games with in-your-face, one-on-one basketball.

Still, the 76ers were disappointing. Their 50-32 record of 1976-77 was only four wins better than the previous Sixers' record (46-36)—and that had been achieved before owner Dixon had paid millions from his Widener family fortune to the New York Nets for Julius Erving. The addition of Dr. J and veteran, shot-blocking center Caldwell Jones made Philadelphia, on paper, as impressive a team as had ever existed in the NBA. And off the court, the Sixers were as classy a group of individuals as could be found in the league: warm, friendly, fun-loving, open and honest with the media (at times to their own detriment).

What happened on the court was quite another story. To begin with, Erving too often received the ball as an afterthought and too far from the basket to utilize his spectacular scoring moves. That was only part of the problem. Except for Collins, the 76ers did not move well without the ball. Thus defenses were able to sag to the middle and crimp both Erving and McGinnis, making the 76ers, as one observer put it, "look like a Rodin museum."

As the offense went static, the one-on-one flaw grew more conspicuous. Shue tried to remedy it, preaching discipline and more emphasis on set plays, but he failed to get his team to respond. The 76ers simply lacked the emotional makeup of a selfless, disciplined winner—as was apparent in the 1977 NBA playoff finals against Portland. The Trail Blazers lost the first two games and then swept the next four, exposing as ill-advised Philadelphia's one-on-one swoops to and distant pops at the basket. And the unremitting griping and moaning by the players—much of it directed at Shue—did not encourage teamwork.

Billy Cunningham was supposed to defuse the dissension among the dispirited Sixers and get them to perform as a team. Cunningham, for many years a local favorite until an injury in 1975-76 ended his career, was welcomed at a squad meeting by his former teammates. The mood was reflected by Julius Erving's greeting Cunningham with an embrace.

The 34-year-old Cunningham was respected by the 76ers as a ferocious competitor—his jersey number 32 had been retired the previous season—and was admired personally as well. In his playing days, Billy had been Steve Mix's drinking buddy and, after Cunningham retired, he'd kept his close ties with the players while working as an analyst for CBS during telecasts of NBA games.

Cunningham's effusive presence, in contrast to Shue's aloof figure, was expected to create a new spirit. As Mix observed: "Warmth from a coach is important. It's good to have a drink together. It was getting stale with Gene—we needed a change." To which Collins added: "We need a guy like Billy to put an arm around us and comfort us."

Back then even McGinnis saw the coaching change as beneficial. "Billy," he said, "will let you holler and holler and—*boom*—'Let's discuss it,' he'll say. Then it's 'I'm sorry, you're sorry, and let's go out and bust ass.' Shue got you madder than the point where you started hollering. That's what it's all about. It's better to let a person be what he is. Billy lets you."

Though these were sounds of men seemingly intent on being a team, the egomania and dissension that undermined Philadelphia under Shue still existed. The signs were there even as Cunningham took over the team. On November 4, 1977, when 76ers general manager Pat Williams phoned the players to inform them that Shue was fired

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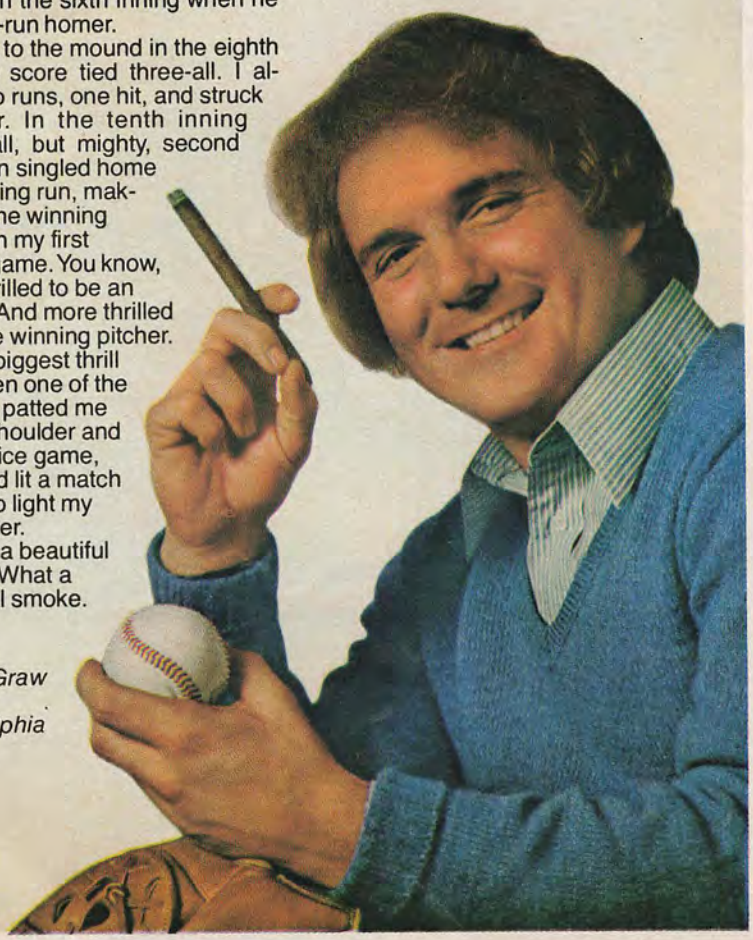
I didn't think a crowd could make any more noise. Not until the legends on our team were introduced. For our center fielder, one of baseball's all-time greats, the fans shouted and cheered until I was sure the place was going to fall down. For our right fielder, who played for Atlanta, and at that time was getting close to breaking the all-time home run record, the roar was twice as loud and twice as long. And he got the same tumultuous ovation in the sixth inning when he hit a two-run homer.

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and that the new coach, Cunningham, wanted to meet privately with each man, the team responded with a familiar lack of unity. Lloyd Free did not appear for his meeting with Cunningham, offering a coy explanation: "Nobody called me. Unless of course, they called and I just didn't answer the phone."

In fact, Free had heard about the coaching change from teammate Darryl Dawkins, and was not thrilled by the news. For most of last season Free had lobbied for more playing time, complaining: "I ain't no yo-yo that somebody can just throw up and down. I'm not his [Shue's] toy." The reference was to the nonstarting, though extensive use Shue made of Free, who goes by the self-proclaimed tag, "All World."

By the start of this season, Free had persuaded Shue that he deserved more playing time, which accounted for Lloyd's reluctance to hear what Cunningham had to say. For all that World knew, he might be back to scratching for his minutes again. If this attitude seemed unduly alarmist—and somewhat unfair to Cunningham—it jibed with the general 76ers' emphasis on individual gratification. And while that perspective had produced a crowd-pleasing style of ball, it also brought, as Shue could attest, chaos that undermined the team.

Nowhere was chaos more apparent than in the way the Sixers carried on in Shue's practices. These sessions had the goofball spirit of Three Stooges movies, with McGinnis, in a painter's cap, smoking cigarettes and sipping Cokes, Free wearing a baseball cap, Dawkins wearing such outlandish outfits as red sweatpants supported by black suspenders, and Joe Bryant spinning a basketball on his finger while Shue addressed the club. Mix and Bryant even came to blows in practice. Shue said he was "so embarrassed for them" [the players] that he closed some practices to the media during the playoffs.

McGinnis had seemed concerned about losing his role as team leader ever since Dr. J arrived. For his part, Erving was careful to avoid inflaming the situation. By season's end, though, the Doctor's play had made him the unofficial leader of the team, and in the playoffs McGinnis went into both a shell and a shooting slump. Though the Sixers meant no harm, they took to needling George in practice every time he threw up an airball, chanting: "Brick!" The effect on McGinnis, as former Knick Bill Bradley later observed, was to alienate big George from the rest of the team, a feeling that exacerbated his slump. The 76ers perished as they

lived—by their self-centered designs.

All of this led Shue to tighten his grip on the team at the beginning of this season. "The players," he said, "were given every chance for an entire year to accept responsibility and learn how to act. They proved to me without any doubt that they couldn't do it."

Shue adopted a tougher posture and instituted a system of fines to penalize players who did not accept the discipline. To the free-spirited 76ers, Shue's new methods seemed heavy-handed.

They suited Shue, who was a jump-shooting, crewcut backcourt man when NBA play was more patterned. By contrast, Cunningham as a player was noted for his "moves," his ability to improvise with the ball. He was a white ballplayer from the Brooklyn schoolyards who, it was said, "played black."

Thus, after Cunningham became coach, the Sixers began to open up their game and play with push-it-up, give-'em-a-thrill instincts.

"Before," said McGinnis, "if you made an error, you'd say, 'oh hell,' put your head down and feel you owed everyone an apology. Now, if you make a mistake, it's not the end of the world. Someone will say, 'That's okay, buddy, get it back next time.' It's much more comfortable playing in this atmosphere."

Initially, Cunningham had a tonic effect on the team. Not only did he encourage the 76ers to play with elan—and never mind the mistakes—he also used his bench more than Shue had, which pleased disgruntled reserves like Free, Mix and Bryant.

"I want everyone," Cunningham said, "to feel he will contribute to victory with this ballclub. I'll make a few changes—a faster-paced game, a little more pressure defense, running more, get the centers more involved in the offense."

Cunningham also treated his players as individuals. Those who sought attention (Collins, Dawkins, Free, McGinnis, Mix and Bryant) had their backs patted and were made to feel wanted. Erving, Henry Bibby, Jones, Harvey Catchings and Ted McClain did not demand ego massages.

"We are a family now," Cunningham said. "We have to keep our problems within, not let them get out in the papers. I'm not going to change my personality to coach. I can be a player's friend and we can still talk. But I'm the one who will make the final decision when we walk into the lockerroom or out onto the court. They'll respect that or I'm not gonna tolerate it."

Cunningham's 76ers won four successive games in late November, lost to Washington, then won ten games in a row. During the streak, something very nearly resembling *esprit* seemed to develop: The reserves, now getting more playing time, nicknamed themselves The Bomb Squad in contrast to the starters, who were known as The Charmers.

But the Sixers were still reluctant to adopt the role-playing that NBA champions traditionally have had. From the Celtic dynasty, to the classic Knick teams of the early 1970s, on down to last year's Portland club, NBA titlists have had a majority of players willing to subordinate their scoring averages and work at the unglamorous phases of the game—defense, boxing out, setting picks, passing. Boston had its Satch Sanders and K.C. Jones to concentrate on defense. New York had Bill Bradley to create motion and keep the ball moving. Portland's role players were Bob Gross, Dave Twardzik, Lloyd Neal and Johnny Davis. What Philadelphia had was a team of gunners. And, not surprisingly, there were still instances of bad attitude among the players during the ten-game streak.

In one game, Cunningham, agitated by Free's showboating with the basketball, jumped off the bench and yelled, "Get under control, World." Annoyed, Free muttered: "I am under control," and then ran by the bench and asked to be taken out. Cunningham rose angrily and motioned the guard off the floor. Then as Free drew near, Cunningham snapped: "Who the hell do you think you are, Free?"

In addition, Cunningham and Doug Collins argued during the win streak, and McGinnis was annoyed about his reduced playing time. After a come-from-behind victory over New Orleans, McGinnis asked for a private meeting with Cunningham to discuss his role with the team and later complained to the press that he was not getting enough time.

Cunningham got credit in the media for his handling of Sixer egos, but former coach Shue confided, "All the players are doing now is falling in line. Billy is being very friendly with them, but when Billy has to finally coach them, then you will see the types of problems they have. What kind of problems? Well, I went with the guys I thought



Though Dr. J shows emotion on the court, he carefully avoids popping off on the fact that his game suffers with Philly.

would win for me. That was Doc and George and Doug. With Billy, more of the other guys are playing more. Free and Bryant are getting time. Eventually, the other players will get sick of that and all of a sudden, they'll want more time . . . . Doug will do that and George—heck, they already are complaining—and so will Doc."

Shue knew his Sixers. In December, when the team lost four games in a row, the me-first problems that Philadelphia had under Shue surfaced full force once again. Guard Henry Bibby, for instance, became annoyed the night Cunningham shouted at him just as he was about to release his jump shot. According to Bibby, Cunningham shouted, "Don't shoot"—words not calculated to enhance Bibby's fieldgoal percentage. This, coupled with diminished playing time, prompted Bibby to seek out Cunningham after a December 10 loss to Indiana and ask what was going on.

The Sixers now routinely wondered about Cunningham. In private, they questioned his robotlike deployment of players. His substitutions, it seemed to them, had a preplanned quality that did not take into account the flow of the game. By December 14, against Atlanta, the players were letting Cunningham know immediately when they disagreed with his coaching moves. After Cunningham shouted at Collins for missing a play called from the bench, Collins began hollering at his coach during a timeout. Cunningham hollered back. Such exchanges became commonplace as the season wore on, a holdover problem, some observers felt, from their days as teammates. In Cunningham's last full season, Collins was a second-year man and the fiery, outspoken veteran's vituperative criticism often brought the emotional youngster to tears. Several times, Collins asked coach Shue to please get Cunningham off his back.

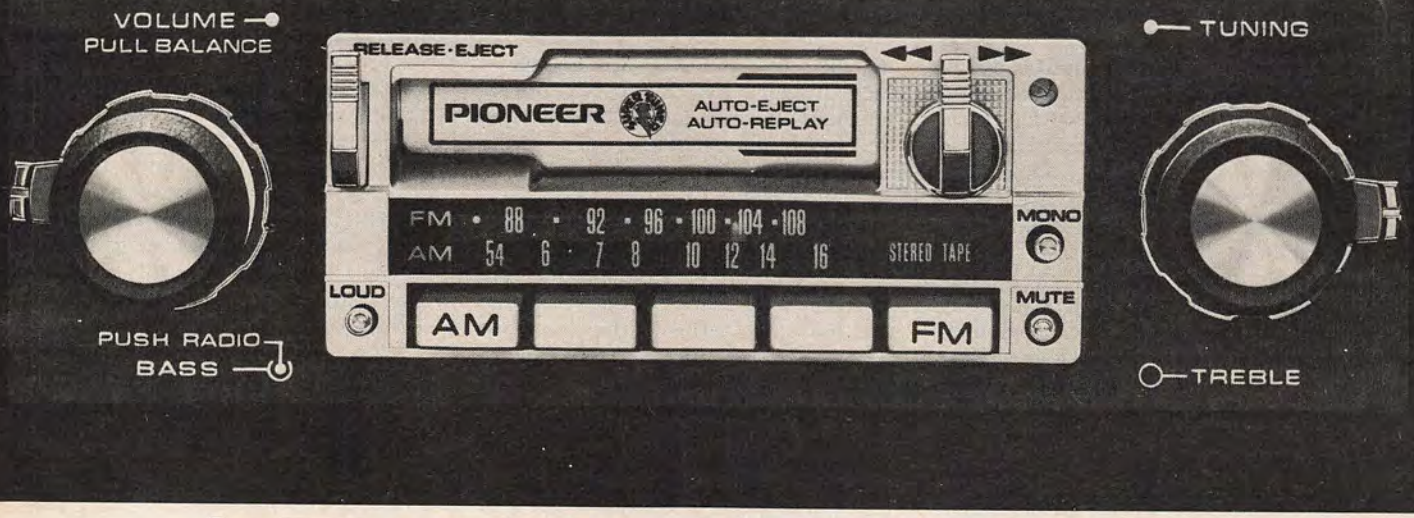
Now Collins, when out of the game, began sitting near assistant coach Chuck Daly, with whom he had become close friends. When Collins felt he had been on the pines too long, he was at times observed tapping Daly's knee and saying, "Get him [Cunningham] to put me back in. . . ."

The most telling moment during that mid-December game came when Cunningham encountered the kind of frustration Shue had had as the 76ers succumbed to flat-out one-on-one basketball. Though Cunningham had been a freewheeling player, he knew that when his team's game turned raggedy, it was necessary to fall back on set plays until the club's rhythm returned. It was with that in mind one night against Atlanta that he pointed down the bench and summoned his former drinking partner, Steve Mix, to inject a note of calm into the out-of-control 76er offense.

"You know what you're supposed to do?" he asked Mix during a timeout. Mix looked at his coach and said, "*I* know. The question is—does everyone else around here know?" After the game, Cunningham sought refuge in the training room, where he was given a beer and consoled by trainer Al Domenico. Cunningham sat on the training room table, his head in his hands, seemingly disillusioned and drained by his team's losing performance.

The emotion felt by Cunningham, coupled with Mix's remark, underscored the hard feelings that were developing. The discontent often involved Cunningham. The same old Sixer problems—playing time and getting the ball to shoot—were behind the players' gripes. Typical was the reaction of McGinnis on being removed from games. One night, he returned to the bench and loudly complained: "These

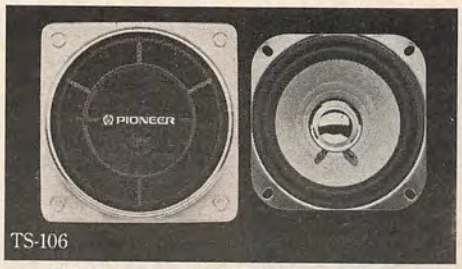




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guys [coaches] are crazy. They don't know what they're doing. They don't know who's supposed to shoot or who's supposed to play."

Even Dr. J, who in the past had kept his own counsel, was miffed at being on the bench when ballgames were on the line. Asked by the press after one close game about his having been a spectator with time running out, Erving replied with uncharacteristic sarcasm: "Oh, you noticed that too, huh?"

On becoming coach, Cunningham had hired Chuck Daly of the University of Pennsylvania as one assistant and retained veteran assistant Jack McMahon to aid him in guiding the Sixers. Cunningham announced that he was closing practices to the press for two weeks until he got adjusted, but the "closed" policy continued through the season. Practices ran only 30 to 40 minutes, Cunningham explained, because: "That's about all the concentration I can get out of them."

A 76er veteran said, "Practices on this team are still a joke."

The workouts at Widener College gymnasium could be viewed through a small window, and one afternoon provided a peculiar scene: Here was Free doing so much fancy dribbling during a scrimmage that Cunningham became enraged enough to order Lloyd to the sides. Later, though, when Collins got angry over what he regarded as Bryant's overguarding, Collins threw the ball against the backboard and Cunningham chose to ignore the tantrum. Seeing that, Free took it upon himself to return to the court.

"Gene Shue," Free said later, "would have took Doug out of practice and sent him *home*. You can't feel sorry for nobody, man. You got to treat everybody the same. I don't care who the hell they are—if they're your friends, stars—you got to treat them like you treat the other guys."

By January, Cunningham and the Sixers had a shaky coexistence, and it appeared that Billy had lost the objectivity a coach must have. One night Cunningham substituted Mix for McGinnis, who hadn't been rebounding or playing tough defense with his team behind. Some eight minutes later, the Sixers having cut the deficit, Cunningham saw that McGinnis was sulking and asked Daly if he should yank Mix and put the big man back in. Daly looked at him with a stricken expression and yelled: "Are you crazy? Mix is winning the ballgame for us!"

Shue, still a close observer of Sixer happenings, said, "Billy is not doing any serious coaching on this team. The players are playing great schoolyard basketball and whatever Xs and Os have to be drawn, Chuck Daly's doing it. Billy is only a figurehead."

If Shue's remarks sounded like sour grapes, in fact they accurately reflected the mood of the 76ers. As one player put it: "This team doesn't need a coach. Actually, we've become uncoachable. Our talent is winning. Not Billy Cunningham's expertise. Dixon got what he deserved."

Sixer owner Fitz Dixon is a small, owlish man who inherited a multimillion-dollar fortune from his great-grandfather, who owned a Philadelphia trolley line. In the 1950s, Dixon coached football, tennis and squash at his own prep *alma mater*, Episcopal Academy on Philadelphia's Main Line, and dreamed of owning a major-league team in the city.

Eventually he did, purchasing a professional lacrosse franchise, which quickly folded, and then the 76ers. Dixon was not an endearing figure to the Sixers, one of whom characterized Fitz as: "rather bourgeois and definitely weird." Dixon's use of bodyguards at the Spectrum to keep the public away from him and his insistence on keeping the press out of the lockerroom, behind a guarded iron gate, until after his postgame visits, led Philadelphia reporters to hum, as Dixon walked past them, "Hail to the Chief."

Clearly Dixon was not an easy man to work for. After Dixon embarrassed Shue following a loss by chastising him in front of the press ("I'm waiting to hear your excuses"), Shue referred to the owner as "that sonofabitch."

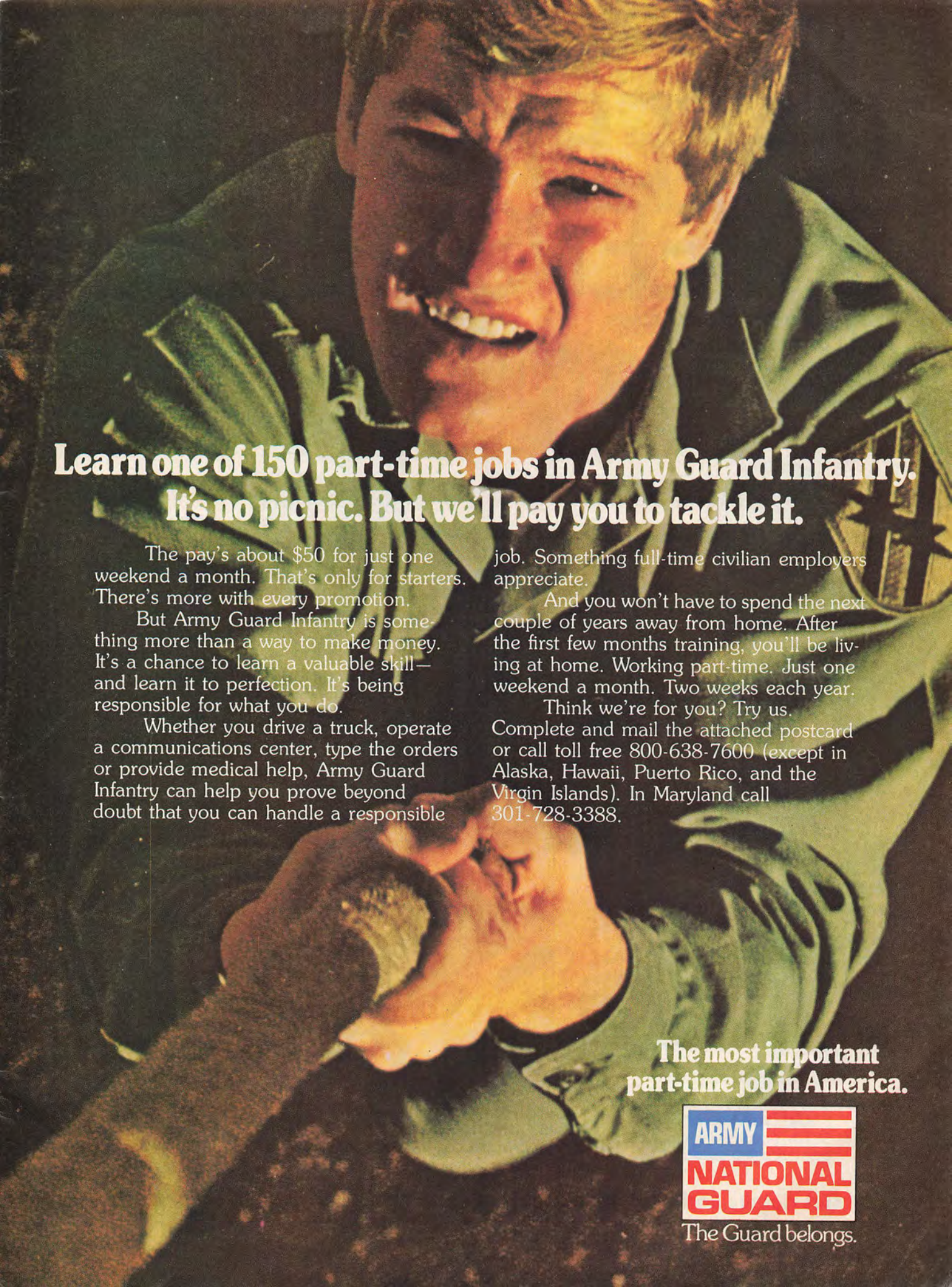
To Dixon, Cunningham was a sunnier, more likeable sort than Shue. According to one Sixer player, "Billy C was the kind of guy Dixon always wanted to be. Good-looking. Everybody's friend. And a great athlete. So Dixon put Billy on a pedestal."

Dixon never figured his charismatic choice as coach would end up with precisely the same headaches that Shue had suffered. But as this season wound down, it was apparent that coaching the Sixers was more complex than charting Xs and Os, or patting guys on the butt.

The team did not suffer Cunningham gladly. There were other scenes. McGinnis, still annoyed with his diminished playing time (although he was averaging more than 20 points and over ten rebounds per game), skipped a road



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trip, saying he had tendonitis in his right knee—an affliction that teammates said George considered less bothersome than the thought of "messing up his point average."

On February 12, against Seattle at the Spectrum, there was again trouble. With 20 seconds left in the third quarter, Dawkins soared for a rebound and snapped an outlet pass to Bryant. Cunningham leaped off the bench and shouted to Dawkins, "Slow it down, will ya!" As Dawkins ran upcourt, he turned to Cunningham and said, "Shut the hell up!" A Seattle player said afterward: "I was stunned to hear that."

Asked later about the incident, Cunningham got red in the face and said, "It's all hearsay. Anyway, I don't really want to comment on that kind of thing."

By late February, freedom of speech ruled the Sixers. In Seattle, Cunningham (who was then No. 2 in the NBA in technical fouls accumulated) was thrown out of the game after being hit with two technicals, a circumstance that caused one Sixer to say, "Billy doesn't know what's happening on the court anyway. He'll do us as much good in the lockerroom." During that same game, Lloyd Free set a record for Sixer *chutzpah* when he was removed from the game just before the half because of erratic play. "I'm not playing any more tonight," Free told Daly, "unless you put me back in now." Daly, who had taken over for Cunningham, sent Free back in. The Supersonics went on to score a one-point victory, and in the dressing room afterward, Collins, who had played badly, burst into tears.

Three days later, when the Sixers arrived in Oakland for a game, Erving and McGinnis got together and called a team meeting to discuss the problems. They insisted that no coaches be present, which Shue had never allowed but which Cunningham was all for. Erving said later that the meeting permitted all 11 players "to air their differences. We wanted to make sure that if we lose, we lose playing *our* game. We play basketball—and that doesn't mean a lot of psychological bullshit."

Philadelphia beat Golden State that night, playing the Sixers' game, which continued to reveal tremendous power but little discipline. Some basketball aficionados maintained that the worst mistake the team had been making was in not clearing out a side for Julius Erving and getting him the ball down low where he could work his magical moves which electrify crowds and pile up points. Erving became so concerned about his game in the Philadelphia system, which forced him to shoot low-percentage jump shots, that friends say he initiated a mid-March meeting with Cunningham to improve the situation. For the next few games the Sixers began getting the ball to Dr. J inside and he performed his surgery as the team won. But experts doubted that the Sixers would consistently make the most use of their ultimate offensive weapon.

By this time, most of the players were convinced that the change of coaches had not been beneficial—although the team, under Cunningham, owned a 50-17 record by late March. Darryl Dawkins, previously a nonfan of Shue's, said, "I realize now that Gene was a good coach. He held me back and didn't put me in there too fast. He made me hungry to play. I didn't understand it then—I wanted to be traded. But now I know what Gene wanted for me."

Not surprisingly, Shue himself agreed with the assessment, saying that if it hadn't been for Lloyd Free's injury in the last playoffs, the Sixers would have won the NBA title. In addition, Shue said, "The championship this year was almost guaranteed if I had been coach, because I had the players all last year and they were under better control. They knew what I wanted them to do."

Of course, Shue's vision of the Sixer potential was rosier than that of many observers, who regarded this team as all too typical of today's athletes—gifted and strong and indulged to a point where perhaps no coach could lead them to victory in the short-series NBA playoffs, particularly if the championship final opponent was Portland. That was the predicted matchup of most experts until five Trail Blazers suffered disabling late-season injuries: Bill Walton, Maurice Lucas, Bob Gross, Lloyd Neal and Larry Steele. If the wounded healed swiftly enough to allow Portland to defeat the tougher Western Conference opponents, the championship series would again likely be a rematch of Sixers vs. Blazers—the schoolyard gang guided by Billy Cunningham, rookie coach, vs. the computer printout masterfully programmed by technician Jack Ramsay. Who would win?

Well, consider the Sixers' February 28 game in Portland after the teams had split their earlier two regular-season confrontations. Although Walton went out with a sprained ankle, the Sixers played like they were intimidated by their fiercest rivals. They scrambled for shots, failed to hit the open man and ended up firing long-range jump shots from all over the court. As his team continued to struggle with the game's final minutes ticking away, Cunningham stared on helplessly. During one timeout, as the Sixer players huddled around their coaches, Cunningham asked Chuck Daly: "What do we do now?" Daly looked down at the notepad in his hand, then shrugged. ■

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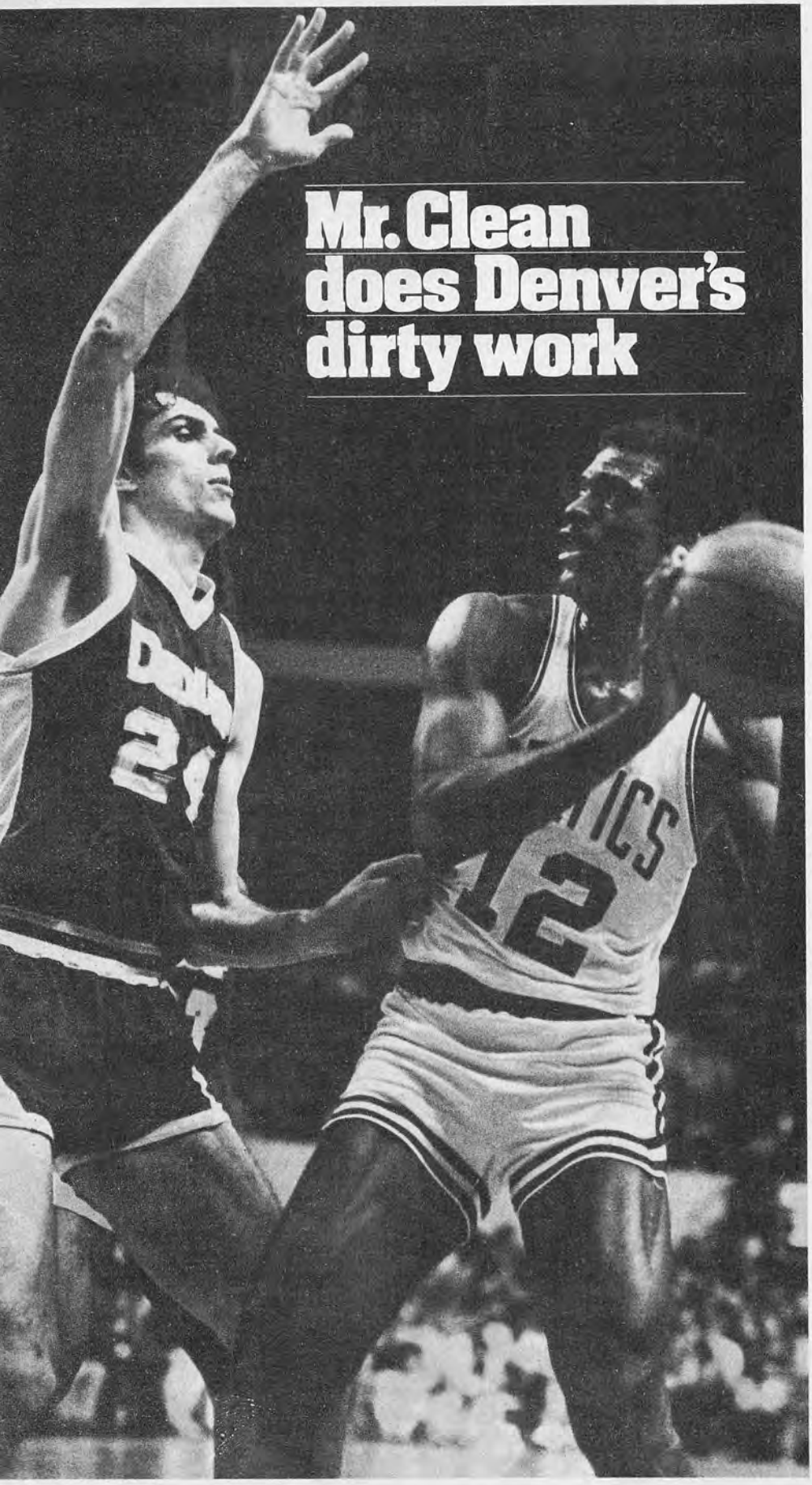
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Mr. Clean does Denver's dirty work

While many NBA stars regard every game as an anything-goes war, Bobby Jones of the Nuggets plays your basic within-the-rules basketball as he blocks shots, steals, rebounds, scores and goes all-out on D. "Jones may be," say experts, "the best overall forward in the league"

by WOODROW PAIGE JR.

The Denver Nuggets-Golden State Warriors late-season game has deteriorated, by the fourth quarter, into a combination quasi-mugging and kick-boxing bout. During a timeout, Denver coach Larry Brown hollers at referee Ed Rush: "You've let the game get out of hand." Push is leading to shove. Golden State backcourtman Charles Dudley hand-checks Denver guard Bobby Wilkerson, then applies a knee to his thigh. Wilkerson replies with an elbow to the rib cage. Meanwhile, beneath the basket, Nugget forward Darnell Hillman hooks Warrior center Robert Parish's arm and jerks him out of position. Parish chops Hillman on the shoulder. Away from the ball Denver's David Thompson skids on the floor after a Phil Smith body block. And Golden State's Nate Williams is doing a number of ungentlemanly things to Denver's Bobby Jones—holding and tripping him in a continuous motion. In the National Basketball Association, Williams' actions call for RETALIATION. Instead, Jones staggers momentarily off-balance, catches himself, puts on a whirling move that turns Williams completely around, breaks for the basket and, on the run, accepts a pass.

Stuff, Jones.

The physical warfare shifts to the other end of the court. Here a grab, there a nudge, here a jab, there a subtle forearm in the back—no flagrant violations, but all teetering over legalistic bounds. Yet Jones is guarding Williams without so much as touching him. The

Jones, here hounding Boston's Sidney Wicks, made the NBA all-defensive team last year with his tenacious guarding.

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Bobby Jones

ball swings to the left side, and Williams pushes off Jones to get the pass. Williams fakes left, then right, and Jones' hand flicks at the ball.

Steal, Jones.

While the others on both teams are busy proving their manhood, Jones is playing your basic within-the-rules basketball. In a span of 90 seconds he scores twice on in-ya-face dunks, makes a free throw, blocks a shot and steals the ball, and shovels off to Thompson for a breakaway jam. A tight four-point Denver lead suddenly becomes a comfortable 11-point cushion with two minutes remaining, and Golden State's four-game winning streak is stopped.

"Watching Bobby Jones on the basketball court," his coach, Larry Brown, says, "is like watching an honest man in a liars' poker game."

Diogenes, the original cynical Greek philosopher, went off in search of an honest man. He never discovered one. But then, he didn't live long enough to find Bobby Jones.

Jones, who wears an expression you could pour on a waffle, is an innocent sort, slender, soft-spoken, shy, an introvert, with dark eyes set deep in their sockets and a haircut that could qualify for *Happy Days*. The Nuggets' 6-foot-9, 208-pound forward doesn't sharpen his elbows on anyone's chest, he doesn't stop opponents by clinging to their jerseys, he doesn't push or shove—all not only accepted, but expected practices in the NBA. It's fashionable these days in basketball, as in society, to see how much you can get away with. Jones is an exception.

Example: In one Denver game Jones told an official that a mistake had been made on a foul, that it was actually on Jones. Even though it was his fifth. "Jones never says anything to us, so I got to think he was right, and I changed it," the referee said.

Example: Against Portland this season Jones, as usual, guarded Maurice Lucas, and the league's toughest forward tried to intimidate the lighter Denver forward with an assortment of muscling tactics. Jones never changed style or expression. He scored 17 points while holding Lucas to eight.

Example: Last season the Nuggets acquired Paul Silas, a wily veteran, NBA forward. At practice one afternoon Silas showed Jones a slightly illegal method of easing inside the opposing rebounder under the basket while the referees' attention was riveted on the shot going up. Jones declined the lesson. "For veterans like Paul I consider that executive privilege," Jones says. "But that's not my game."

According to a forward on another team, Jones "is the cleanest player in the game. He would be something if he just would be a little physical and rough."

But Jones prefers to play by the rules. "If players want to do those things and can get away with them, that's their game. I don't care for it. If I have to play defense by holding on, that's when I quit. If I have to use my elbow to get position, then I'm going to have to settle for another position. And if I foul, or if the official makes a mistake, there's no use screaming about it. It won't change things or make me any happier."

Because of—or in spite of—his honesty, Jones seems to be doing just fine, thank you. In his first three seasons (two of which were spent in the old ABA), the Nuggets won their division and they danced off with the Midwest championship this year. Jones is the only current player who has been with the team the last four seasons. "He may be the best overall forward in the game," Brown says, "and he has accomplished it without resorting to improper techniques."

"Watching Jones is like watching an honest man in a liars' poker game"

The Golden State game in Denver this past March was typical of Jones' value to the Nuggets. He hit on all 12 field-goals he tried and on five of six free throws for 29 points. He also had seven rebounds, three assists, three steals, one blocked shot and just one turnover. Rick Barry was limited to six of 18 field-goal attempts when Jones was guarding him, and Jones was responsible for the critical turn at the conclusion of the hard-fought game.

Afterward, Warriors coach Al Attles said, "When I was in Hawaii a few years ago scouting a college All-Star game, several coaches were saying Jones wouldn't make a great pro. I knew he would. He's not flashy, but look what he did tonight. He knows his strengths and weaknesses, and he plays to his strength. Some may say he's not physical enough, but, heck, you can't be everything. Do you want to beat up the other team or beat them?"

After Bobby Jones had been a major influence in Denver's three-straight victories over the world champion Trail Blazers this season, Portland coach Jack Ramsay said, "Nobody plays harder than Jones. I'd love to have him."

Midway in one game against Portland, Blazer guard Lionel Hollins stole the ball and was off for an easy layup. But Jones, racing after, overtook Hollins, blocked the ball off the glass and recovered. If the NBA had a category called "breakaways prevented," Jones would lead by a hundred. In the closing moments Jones left his man, Lloyd Neal, and blocked a Bobby Gross shot. The next trip down, Jones rejected Neal's shot. Denver won by three points.

"Nobody asked me after the game because they were looking at who scored the points," recalls Ramsay, "but Jones won it with the two blocks. If he doesn't block them, we win. It's that simple. People tend to overlook him, but Jones is a coach's player."

And nobody respects Jones more than David Thompson, who receives the bulk of attention on the Denver team. "Bobby does all the dirty work nobody else does. He keeps me from looking bad. Your guy may beat you, but Bobby will block the shot. You might miss, and he'll rebound and make the play. He always gives 100 percent, and you can't say that about practically anybody."

Julius Erving, the famed surgeon general, says Jones "will play the whole game, and you don't notice anything he does. Then you look at the stats. He's got 20 points, ten rebounds, three blocks—that kind of thing—and the guy he's guarded had to work for 15 points. And Denver wins the game."

It's almost impossible to find anyone in the NBA who has a bad word about Jones, who doesn't smoke, drink, curse or let darkness catch him out of bounds. He goes to church, helps old ladies cross the street, pats children on the head and hangs up his clothes every night. He gives (here we go again) an honest effort every game. He's also the best white leaper in the league.

A computer hired by Seagram Distillers determined that Jones was "the most consistent and productive player" in the NBA last season. Jones presented his $10,000 award to charity—mostly Christian-related organizations—and said, on the podium at the liquor company's dinner (served without liquor at his request): "I'm definitely against whiskey, and I just felt God gave me this money not to keep, but to use. God uses us in different ways. I get money from people who sell whiskey, and it goes for something different. Besides, I really feel I haven't worked that hard for it."

Jones, you see, doesn't think of himself as a special player, much less a star—although he won the Seagram's award, was the leading vote-getter on the all-defensive team in his first NBA season (1976-77), has been an All-Star

all four pro seasons and tied for first place in the "tall forward" category in a SPORT survey (April '78) of basketball experts.

Nugget coach Larry Brown frowns when he reflects on Jones' self-evaluation, saying, "He told me he wasn't as good as I make him out to be. If only he would realize his potential, he could have the greatest influence on the next generation of basketball players. Kids can look up to him and say, here's a clean-liver who believes in Christ, doesn't have any bad habits, and he made it to the pros playing the game the way it was intended to be played, making a lot of money and"—Brown laughs—"driving an LTD." Jones, no spendthrift, does drive a Ford leased by the team, and on the road he wore sneakers and jeans until a dress code edict by Brown. "When I told the players we would start wearing ties and nice pants on the planes," Brown continues, "Bobby asked if we could wait to start that because all he had were jeans."

Jones is not perfect. He didn't write his mother last week. He sleeps too much. He occasionally misses a free throw. And if Steve Austin, the Bionic Man, has a six-million-dollar body, Jones' cost about $34.

For a while this season, Jones' career appeared to be threatened. In his kitchen on January 8, Jones passed out, fell on a butcher block, opened a gash over his right eye and was rushed to a hospital. The Nuggets announced before that night's game that Jones was suffering from the flu, but the real ailment was suspected to be epilepsy. It was Jones' third seizure in three years, and he was sent to the UCLA Medical Center for an examination. Tests revealed that Jones had a primary seizure disorder—similar in form to epileptic fits, but not as severe. Jones rejoined the Nuggets for their next game with another new medication. He already was taking Inderal for a heart problem.

"My whole life I didn't even like to take aspirins, and now I'm forced to take all kinds of things," Jones says. Doctors discovered two years ago that, in simplified terms, a secondary pacemaker was taking over in Jones' heart whenever he participated in physical activity—like basketball—and it made him tire quickly. The Nuggets had to rest him more last season. A new medication corrected the problem this season but also "made me drowsy and weak." Now he is on the minimum plus Meberal for the seizure problem—and has become susceptible to viruses.

Nevertheless, Jones had missed only three games by late season, and he thought his body was developing a tolerance for the medicine. "I'm finally feeling okay again," he says, "but I was worried, not so much about playing as about leading a normal life. But the doctors told me that physical activity is probably good for me."

Jones was battling for the league's top fieldgoal percentage—over 57 percent—which would set a record for forwards. His career averages of 15 points and nine rebounds a game remained about the same. And he was the only forward with more than 100 steals and 100 blocked shots.

All this from a young man who doesn't care for basketball that much, anyway. If the NBA were to go belly-up tomorrow, Jones says, "I would just go back to my home in Charlotte, N.C. and find something else to do."

Nugget general manager Carl Scheer says Jones "is the most unusual athlete I've ever been associated with. The great players are always blessed with natural talents, but most of them have this great obsession with success. Bobby's not like that. He can turn his emotions on and off. He never gets down or disappointed or even excited. He sets standards for himself on and off the court, and he adheres to them."

"If I have to play defense by holding on, that's when I quit"

When I told Jones that SPORT was interested in a story on him, he said, "My father would like that." Jones invited me to his house for 6:30 p.m., then called that afternoon and changed the time to 8:30 because he had forgotten about a prayer meeting.

Jones lives in a middle-class neighborhood outside Denver where the houses are stacked like dominoes. Bobby led me upstairs to his den, which was overwhelmed by a Ping-Pong table. Scattered around the room were a map of the U.S., a video game, a few books, nonsports magazines, a dart board and a large, faded chair. Nothing linked Jones to basketball.

"When did you start really being in love with the game?" I opened.

"Never," Jones closed. Then he answered a long-distance phone call from his brother Kirby, two years older, who told Bobby he was about to become an uncle. Kirby had been a high-school All-Star in basketball and played at Oklahoma, where their father had been a member of the national championship runnerup team in 1949. That was a tipoff on how Jones became involved in basketball. "My father put a goal out back," Bobby said, "and he and Kirby played all the time. I didn't enjoy sports, I would rather watch television, but my father wanted me to play."

In the sixth grade Jones was coerced into playing for a church team "because I was kind of tall. But I was uncoordinated. In the seventh grade I went out for the junior-high team, and I was the last man on the bench. I couldn't shoot or dribble, and I guess that's why I picked up on rebounding and passing and playing defense. I didn't want the ball, and as soon as I got it, I passed off." He was lefthanded but began shooting with his right hand because everyone else did. Today he plays ambidextrously. "I suppose I just fell into the routine of basketball about that time," he says. "It was something to do every fall." But when the season was over, he'd put the ball away.

He continued to grow rapidly, which was the only reason the coach kept him around, and by the tenth grade he became a 6-6 stringbean starter alongside his brother. Jones also took up track, which he liked because "I could practice by myself and spend as little time as I wanted, then go home." As a sophomore, he won the state high-jump title, then finished second the next year to a kid named Bob McAdoo. Their paths have since crossed. McAdoo graduated, and Jones set the state record as a senior by jumping 6-8. He also was Charlotte's player of the year in basketball as a junior and a senior and led South Mecklenburg High to the state playoffs both seasons. They lost to McAdoo's Greensboro team the first year and won the championship the next.

"It was still a seasonal thing, but the colleges became interested, so I thought it was a way I could go to school free," Jones says. He picked North Carolina out of regard for coach Dean Smith.

Following his sophomore season (during which McAdoo transferred in, had a great season and then signed a pro contract), Jones met his future wife, Tess West, and doctors discovered he had a heart condition but told Jones that a few weeks' rest would cure it. Of course, it didn't. About that time Smith said an opening had developed at the Olympics basketball tryout camp because a player had left, and Smith had recommended Jones. "I didn't even know there was a camp," he says. "I hadn't been invited to try out for the team, and I wasn't sure where the Olympics were being held."

But he soon found out about Munich, Germany. In the 1972 Olympics the United States lost its first basketball game ever—to the Russians on that infamous disputed ending—and Israeli

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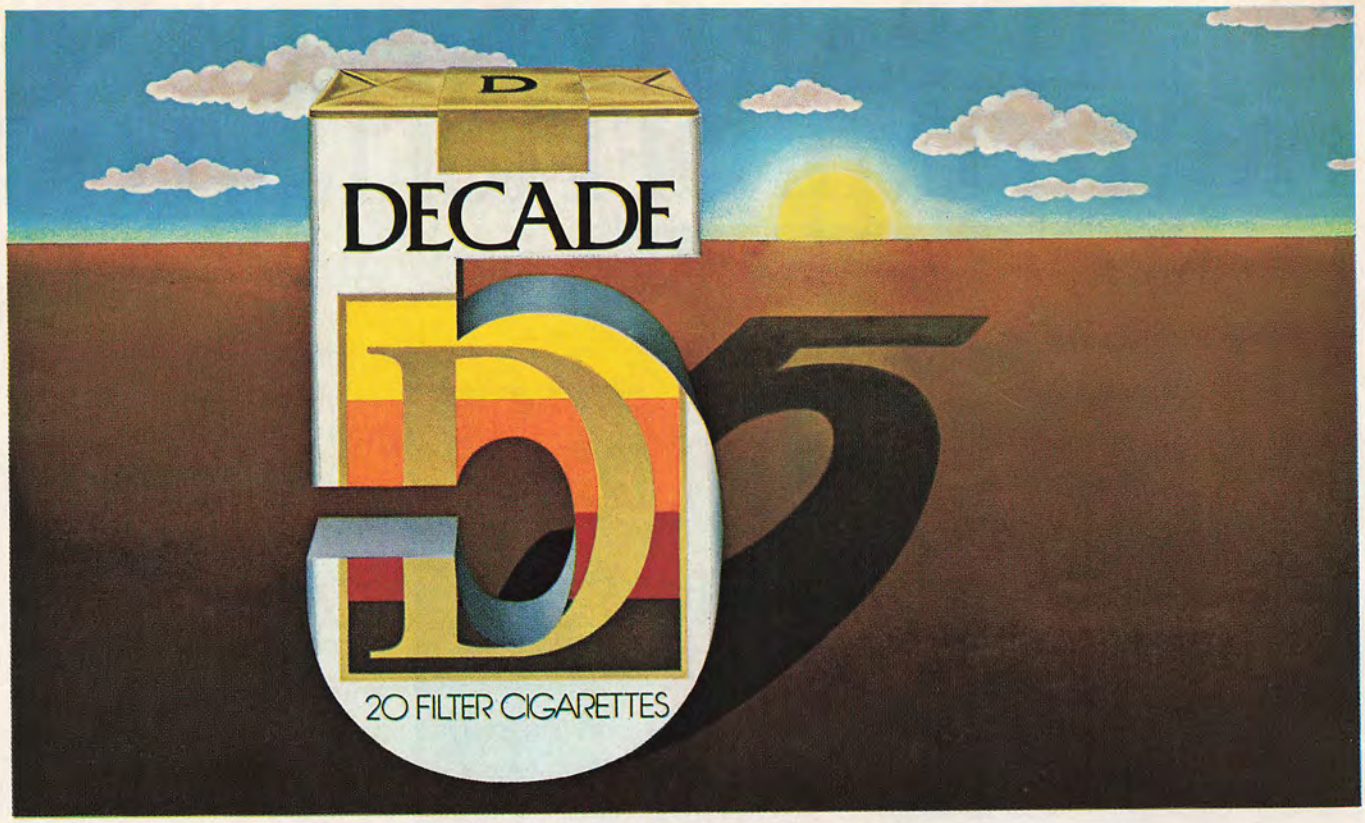
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athletes were slaughtered by a terrorist raid. "It was something TV brought right into my face," Jones recalls. "We were staying in the building next to the Israelis. They closed off the place and came in with tanks. They should have canceled the Olympics. Sports wasn't that important. I'm thankful I got to play because it was the experience of a lifetime, but it opened my eyes. People make too much of sports. And then when we lost to Russia, we were cheated. I gained some insight into life. Even if you cheat, you can win."

Until that summer Jones had been a pseudo-Southern Baptist. "Tess had turned her life to Christ and was teaching a Bible study class. I went to a Federation of Christian Athletes meeting in Arkansas, and when I came back I talked to her and looked at the facts. Jesus was the true answer—the only salvation for me. I committed my life to Him. Until then I was just rolling along accepting whatever occurred. Everything was great. I didn't need Christ. But there He was. I can't tell somebody to follow me. I don't bring up Christianity unless someone asks, but I know it's the right life for me."

Because of Jones' religious beliefs, he causes those around him to react. "I've been saying, 'Oh, shit,' since I was in the crib, but I find myself saying, 'Oh, shoot,' around Bobby," claims Denver trainer Bob Travaglini. "He has a positive effect on you."

The Nuggets' coaching staff tries to change Jones by alluding to his religious convictions. "There were tough people in the Bible, Bobby, so being physical isn't the worst thing," assistant Donnie Walsh told him.

"Maybe so," says Jones. "But that still doesn't make me want to play the game that way. There are a lot of things wrong with basketball."

To which Brown says: "Bobby doesn't realize that there are a lot of things wrong with coaching, writing, life in general. Sometimes I get upset with Bobby, but I know he's not going to change and he probably shouldn't. He's not going to hold somebody just because they're holding him. You know how he'll get back at him? He'll play harder and beat the guy playing clean basketball."

Brown, then coach of the Carolina Cougars, first drafted Jones after his junior year at North Carolina. "But I wanted to finish school," says Bobby, "and I wasn't so sure I was going to play pro basketball. I kinda wanted to stay in Charlotte." The next year, after Jones made All-America, Houston picked him in the NBA, and his ABA rights moved with the Cougars to St. Louis. But the first manuever by Brown and Scheer when they joined the Denver Nuggets in 1974 was to acquire the rights to Jones. And the young man couldn't understand the fight over his services. "I thought maybe I would try pro basketball for a while, but Tess and I couldn't believe the figures. We were about to get married and wondered how they could afford to offer that much." Jones signed with Denver for about $1.4 million over seven years. "That shows you something about basketball. Mitch Kupchak [of the Washington Bullets and a former teammate of Jones' at North Carolina] had the same type of career in college, but he came out after the merger and got a lot less than I did. I was just in the right place at the right time."

Jones wasn't concerned that he picked the ABA over the established NBA. "Didn't matter. I didn't want to be the center of attention. That's why I'm glad David Thompson is on this team. He gets the publicity, which is fine. I would just as soon be in the background. I don't care how long I play in a game or even if I play. We've got Bo Ellis [a rookie from Marquette], and he's coming along. I wouldn't mind sitting on the bench and being a cheerleader for him. I don't know, though, how long they would pay for that."

When asked when he first fell in love with basketball, Jones said: "Never"

It took Brown just one game to reinforce his feelings about Jones' future. Denver played an exhibition against the Boston Celtics in 1974, and Jones held John Havlicek to 14 points while scoring 20. "Doug [Moe, then Brown's assistant] and I were giggling after the game because we knew we came up with a steal—the rookie of the decade."

Jones became an instant standout in the ABA, but then, like now, he has to wear on you. You have to watch Jones every night to appreciate him. With only two appearances in every league city, he slides by the casual viewer. "He's a dream player," says Buffalo coach Cotton Fitzsimmons. "He automatically does and likes to do what you have to beg every other player to do—board, play defense all over, block shots, box out, hustle. Give me ten like him, and I'll run away with the league."

In Jones' first three seasons he averaged 14.8, 14.9 and, in the supposedly stronger NBA, 15.1 ppg. Consistent. He missed only one game. He shot 60, 58 and 57 percent, and he was among the leading forwards in shots blocked, steals and assists. The Seagram's Award computed that if Jones averaged 48 minutes, he would average 24.6 points, 13.4 rebounds, 5.2 assists, 3.2 blocked shots and 3.7 steals per game. But Jones says: "I do some things well, but I'm not a good shooter, and I'm not that strong on the boards. My quickness and finesse help me."

Brown says he once begged Jones to shoot more and he took nine shots in the next game. "I do what I'm able to do," says Jones, "what we need. You got to remember if I threw up more shots, a lot would be bricks." And he even maligns his own defense. "Most players don't work at it. I get a lot of steals and blocked shots off people I'm *not* guarding because they're surprised."

Then comes the statement which may explain why Jones is not enamored with the sport: "I don't think I enjoy it as much as some players. If you're scoring a lot, I guess that makes it more fun. But the things I do are plain hard work, and it's not very gratifying unless the team wins." However, losses and victories don't disturb him totally. "I know Larry really gets upset if we lose, like in the playoffs last year. But we can't bring the game back. As soon as a game is over, I try to forget it."

Jones simply claims to "go out and do the best I can and hope that's good enough. It's not the end of the world if we lose. I'd like to win a championship, but it's not the only thing."

"So would you like to be remembered as a great basketball player?"

"Well, it would be okay if I had a son, but not really."

Brown doesn't completely accept Jones' detachment. "I think he loves the game. He has to, or he wouldn't play the way he does." Brown and Scheer feel so strongly about Jones that they turned down a trade in the off-season with Philadelphia that would have swapped George McGinnis and another player for Jones.

Still, Jones says money is his prime motivation. "The financial security is important, plus I guess I can prove something to kids. I see very little of the money I make, so I'll have it when I'm through, and I can go back to Charlotte and get a job."

Yet as the Midwest Division-champion Nuggets get ready for the playoffs, Jones says, "I am enjoying this season more now that I've gotten my body straightened out. We have a young team [four rookies], and we could accomplish something in the playoffs. Maybe I'll get it going this year."

Most people feel Bobby Jones has already got it going awfully good indeed. Honest. ■

At a time when selfishness runs rampant in the NBA, Portland guard Johnny Davis willingly sacrifices his point totals and game time to play a "role" on the defending champion Trail Blazers. "The bottom line," Davis says, "is to win"

by ROGER DIRECTOR

Johnny Davis dribbled the ball to the right of the key 30 feet from the basket. The Chicago Stadium clock ticked down to the end of a Sunday afternoon game in late February, with the world champion Portland Trail Blazers leading the Chicago Bulls, 98-97.

Except for the fact that Davis had started and played 42 minutes—he is normally a 24-minute-a-game substitute guard for the Blazers—it had been a typical day's work for him. He had scored 16 points (eight of them in a seesaw final period), all of them on layups and dunks off fast breaks and inside feeds and the fouls he had drawn with his lightning-quick drives to the hoop.

As Davis dribbled the clock away, his eyes combed his forward line, waiting for one of his teammates to swing into a clearing behind a baseline pick. But Chicago fought through the picks and the Blazers were unable to execute their set play. With the shot clock about to run out, Davis darted left and leaped high to shoot from 25 feet. But Chicago's 6-10 forward, Mickey Johnson—realizing that Davis had to force up the shot—jumped out and swatted the shot downcourt to a streaking Wilbur Holland, whose layup put the Bulls ahead, 99-98, with just six seconds left.

For the normally unimpeachable Blazers, it was a shocking misplay. And for the usually unflappable Davis, it seemed a distressing lapse. Even though the Blazers' All-Star guard, Lionel Hollins, bailed him out with a spectacular 40-foot jump shot that beat the Bulls at the buzzer, Davis didn't want to talk in the lockerroom after the game.

It was the latest lesson in Johnny Davis' NBA education. He had come to the Blazers the year before as a 20-year-old "hardship" rookie from Dayton. Unlike so many egocentric basketball players in the game today, Davis had gladly conformed to his team "role" within Jack Ramsay's intricately-patterned offense, a system which revolved around interdependent roles rather than individual one-on-one maneuverings. Davis had averaged only 18 minutes a game in his first season—less than that down the stretch—and hadn't even seen action in Portland's opening-round best-of-three playoff victory over Chicago. But when Dave Twardzik was injured in the fifth game of the Denver series, Davis had calmly stepped into the breech. Davis started the sixth game, hit on ten of 14 shots in 39 minutes and scored 25 points, his best effort as a pro. The Blazers eliminated the Nuggets 108-92, and then faced the Los Angeles Lakers in the conference finals.

Coach Ramsay, despite Davis' great game, favored starting Larry Steele, the six-year swingman, in the backcourt against L.A. But assistant coach Jack McKinney and team captain Bill Walton convinced Ramsay that the speed of Lionel Hollins and Johnny Davis would "chew up their guards."

Walton and McKinney were right. The Blazers won four straight games and the Lakers' coach, Jerry West later said of Davis: "He is an outstanding young player with a great future in this league. He's just gonna get better and better."

Against Philadelphia in the finals, Davis started every game and contributed to the Portland triumph with defensive play that hampered the Sixers' playmaking guard, Henry Bibby, from pushing the ball up the court. Philadelphia was thus unable to set up any semblance of team offense. The Blazers came back from a two-game deficit to sweep four games and take the NBA title. Davis had averaged over 31 minutes and 10.5 points a game in the playoffs.

Davis was getting more minutes this season, but was still playing the "role" of the off-guard in Portland's offense, a role which kept him from displaying his offensive abilities. No one appreciated and respected Davis' sacrifices better than team captain Bill Walton, who said: "John is a very key member of this team and a big reason we won the championship last year. He comes to play every night, he works real hard and he is a hell of a nice guy. Between him and Twardzik, we always get a good game from our small guard. Everybody has their roles to contribute, and it's the teams that are willing to make the sacrifices that will win."

But even a consummate and unassuming "team" player like Davis had his individual problems. In January his shooting had dropped off to about 41 percent until the team sent him to an eye doctor who corrected Davis' contact lenses. And as soon as he had regained his shooting touch, he was the subject of newspaper rumors that he, one of the quietest and most unassuming players on the Blazers, had issued a play-me-or-trade-me ultimatum to the team. New York *Post* syndicated columnist Peter Vecsey had also reported in mid-February that Davis had almost been traded to Chicago for veteran Norm Van Lier except that an injury to Twardzik had made Davis too valuable to part with.

Chicago coach Ed Badger said after the February game: "If I'd had the final say-so when we picked in the draft two years ago, I'd have taken Davis. I like his overall attitude, his quickness and his shooting ability—I think he could be a fine all-round guard who could start for a number of teams."

I mentioned Badger's praise to Davis, and he asked me anxiously if I knew anything more about the rumored trade.

"No," I said. "Did it rattle you at all?"

"Not really," Davis said. "It's the first time I've ever been involved in trade talks, but I was determined not to let it affect my play. I'm not in any position to dictate where or when I play. They could come up to me as we're standing here and all I could do about it would be to pack my bags."

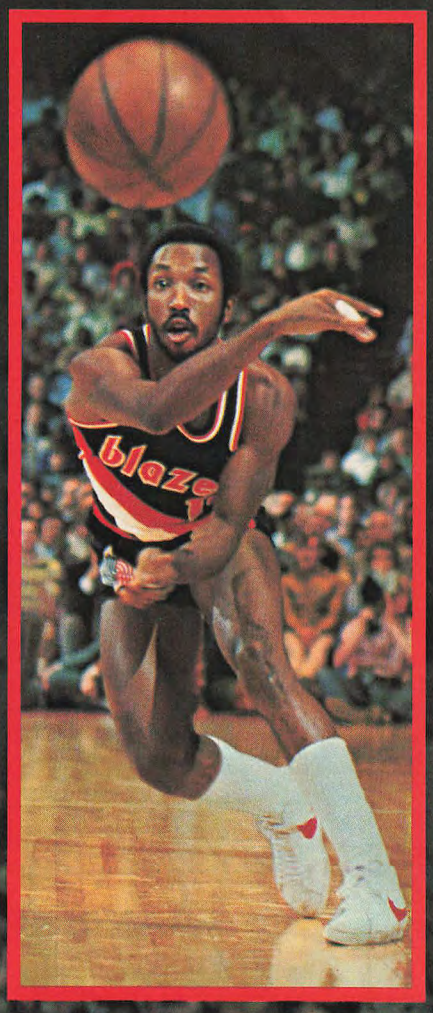
"It must have bothered you to get your shot blocked at the end of the game like that," I said.

"Well, Mickey Johnson just made a great play," Davis said slowly. "You can't really call it a mistake on my part . . . unless you think it's a mistake to shoot the ball with no time left on the shot clock."

Davis paused. "I've learned to handle the ups and downs," he went on. "I think that in times and situations like these a man has to look for something higher to put his faith in. I mean, if you can't go for help to your mother, your father, your sister or your brother . . . if you can't go to your friends . . . there's

Davis makes a rare solo move against Sixer Henry Bibby, but his role with the Blazers calls mainly for passing.

"It's not a one-on-one game"





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only one place you can go''—Davis looked up—''The Man Upstairs. I believe there's a purpose for everything and that we are all put here for a reason and that everything works out for the best . . . if we put our trust in Him.''

Four days later Davis sat on a Madison Square Garden lockerroom bench, glassy-eyed from his all-out exertion during that night's Knick game. On a leather-topped training table in the center of the room, Portland's 50-year-old, bald and bushy-eyebrowed coach, Jack Ramsay, who holds a doctorate in education from the University of Pennsylvania, intently surveyed the game's final stats. In 37 minutes on the court, Davis had scored 17 points, but the Blazers, playing without Bill Walton and Lloyd Neal, had lost to the Knicks.

In the corner of the room opposite Davis, Lionel Hollins, one of Davis' friends on the team, had nearly finished dressing. Hollins seemed pleased I was doing a story on Davis. ''J.D. doesn't talk much,'' Hollins said, ''but he can voice his complaints when he has to. He's just very quiet. He's about not there until you really need him—when it counts. But he's a good guy.''

A moment later, Hollins pointed toward the other end of the room. Sportswriter Peter Vecsey had taken a seat next to Davis and begun interviewing him. Davis' facial features became animated and his hands patted, pointed and grabbed at the air. The reporter was furiously scribbling notes. If, as Jack McKinney had asserted, Davis was ''good for only about six words a day,'' whatever Davis was talking about now had to be momentous.

''Hey . . . see. . . .'' Hollins said with a triumphant smile on his face. ''J.D. is angry now. I told you he can get angry.''

Ramsay—who had previously told the Portland press that Vecsey's trade stories had harmed team morale—scowled at the writer and Davis. But Davis persisted in talking angrily for nearly 15 minutes.

When Vecsey left Davis in the Garden lockerroom, Ramsay immediately went to Davis and began talking in whispers. Later Davis said, ''That's the angriest I've been in a couple of months. I can't believe the man wrote stuff like that. It was inaccurate. I asked him, 'Why didn't you check with me before you printed that?' And he said, 'Sometimes you have to go with what you got.' Not if it's wrong you don't.''

''What did Jack Ramsay say to you when the reporter left?'' I asked.

''Oh, he just wanted to tell me not to worry,'' Davis said. ''Damn,'' he continued. ''I can't dictate where I want to play. I'm not a superstar. I'm not even half a superstar. I'm just one-eleventh of a superstar. Someday I might be a superstar . . . but not right now.''

Three days after Christmas, the Trail Blazers played the Detroit Pistons in Cobo Arena. Portland had lost the previous evening to Chicago and had to play Detroit without Bill Walton, who had injured his knee the night before.

With Walton on the bench in mountain clothes, the Blazers were not able to play their intricate inside passing, cutting and fast-breaking game.

As the off-guard, Davis—whose speed makes him nearly impossible to press—generally brings the ball upcourt and immediately gives it up to the lead guard, Hollins or Twardzik. Then Davis hangs around near the key on the weakside while the Blazers pitch the ball around on the other side. If his teammates can't get free, Davis may try to beat his man inside on a cut for a pass from Walton. Sometimes he takes a pitch near the top of the key when the shot clock is running down and no teammates are nearby to set picks. But according to Davis, his primary responsibility is to pass the ball back inside before he takes a shot.

Walton: "John is a big reason we won the championship last year"

Without Walton, however, the Blazers have to do more one-on-one and perimeter shooting, and Davis, playing before his family and friends in his hometown, has shot better against the Pistons than any other team.

The Blazers opened the game with sloppy play; 19 turnovers in the first half helped Detroit build a 52-46 lead which grew wider in the third quarter. At 10:22 of the third quarter, Twardzik drew his fifth foul guarding Eric Money (who had scored 12 points) and Ramsay put Davis into the game for Twardzik. With 5:16 left in the period, Hollins was replaced by Larry Steele. Davis was now in the rare role of Portland's playmaking guard.

Davis glided upcourt with the ball, with his body held upright—perhaps too upright—and the ball bouncing carelessly high. Money took a swipe at the ball but missed and Davis blasted by him down the lane for a layup. Score: Detroit 75, Portland 66.

At the other end of the floor, Money, another Detroit product, drove, drew a foul on Davis and made two free throws. The next time downcourt, Davis stopped at the top of the key and soared into the air over Money for a jump shot that swished through the net.

Money again tried to drive by Davis at the other end, but Davis drew a charging foul, Money's fourth of the game.

Money was immediately replaced by Al Skinner, and Davis went back to work on offense. He drilled a 16-foot jump shot going to his left along the baseline, then, with under a minute left in the quarter, drove inside and was fouled by forward M. L. Carr. Davis' two free throws—his seventh and eighth points in a little more than three minutes—cut the Pistons' lead to three.

Leon Douglas hit a pair of foul shots for Detroit and Davis brought the Blazers downcourt for the last shot. Larry Steele took it as the game clock and the shot clock wound down. A horn sounded as Steele shot and Davis, apparently thinking it to mean the end of the quarter, began walking off the floor. But the Pistons' Douglas rebounded and passed the ball to Chris Ford, who breezed past Davis and scored on a layup with three seconds still left in the quarter.

Davis' mistake didn't cost him any more concentration. He began the fourth quarter by driving to the hoop, drawing a foul and sinking two free throws. The next time downcourt he shot and scored from the top of the key. The following sequence he penetrated on a drive and pitched back to Larry Steele for a wide-open jumper, and on the next possession he fed Lloyd Neal for a basket off a fast break. With six minutes to play in the game, Davis led another Portland fast break and was fouled by M. L. Carr. His two free throws tied the game at 93. Portland went on to win, 111-106, thanks to the play of subs Davis and Neal.

In the lockerroom Ramsay called the victory, ''the win of the season for us. It was a super game for John. He's a great kid. In the playoffs last year, when we lost Dave Twardzik, John stepped in and he led our team. He is in the game as a ballhandler. I give him the green light on defense to go for steals. I look for him to push the ball up, to penetrate and to take the shot when he has it.''

In the hallway outside the arena, a beaming Davis was greeted by some two-dozen smiling friends and family members. While he signed a few autographs, Lionel Hollins and Corky Calhoun stood off to one side and joked about ''the hometown hero.'' The entourage then headed up an escalator toward the parking lot.

Davis, Calhoun, Hollins and I piled into the Davis family's car and headed out of downtown Detroit. ''You were

the sparkplug tonight, Johnny," Hollins said with a chuckle.

"Yeah, Johnny, you were a sparkplug," Calhoun echoed.

"Sparkplug," Davis said, then considered for an instant. "Sparkplug . . . that doesn't sound like I'm gonna get too many minutes." The three of them cracked up.

Davis, who was born in Birmingham, Ala., on October 21, 1955, moved to Detroit at age two. He settled with his mother, his older brother Lonnie and his younger sister Sharon in the Brewster project, a rough-and-tumble outpost in the inner city where, according to Davis, "Nothing is taken for granted . . . not even your life."

He began playing basketball at age 12, following in Lonnie's footsteps. As a senior at Detroit's Murray-Wright High School, Davis made several high school All-America teams, averaged 31 points a game, and received a grant-in-aid to Dayton.

"He kind of played the role with us his freshman year that he played with Portland last year," Dayton coach Don Donoher recalled. "He stepped in with a bunch of seniors his first year and we went all the way to the Western Regionals of the NCAA tournament before losing in triple overtime to UCLA.

"I remember UCLA tried to press us early in that game. Johnny broke their press on the dribble and went through the whole team. Bill Walton was back, and Johnny challenged him and laid it up off the glass right over the top of Walton. There was no more press after that."

Davis entered the NBA draft as a hardship case after his junior year. "I needed to help my family out financially," he said. Davis' mother Dorothy underwent surgery in January of his junior year and was unable to resume her job with the Detroit Board of Education until the following school year. "She wanted me to get my degree," Davis said, "and I worked on it last summer. She never asked me to go hardship. But there comes a point in a man's life when he has to make a decision. We've got a real close family. Love . . . we thrive on it, and we give it freely . . . to one another."

Davis parked the car in front of a modest brick house. Corky, Lionel and I walked into rooms that were already buzzing with over a dozen people talking and joking above good rhythm-and-blues music. I introduced myself to Paul Dean, one of Johnny's basketball coaches at Murray-Wright High. Johnny soon came over and said, "This here's my man. I owe him everything."

Dean gave an embarrassed laugh. "No," he said. "He had the talent. I just taught him stuff like footwork and I changed his shot around. Johnny can jump and run, but he doesn't have the moves of, say, a Hollins—that quick stop-start. One of the problems he had when I coached him was that he wasn't really leaving the floor in practice. I made him jump high because even if he doesn't have great moves, he can get up high enough so that he doesn't have to worry about someone blocking his shot. Johnny used to shoot this way"—Dean brought his right arm across his body toward his left shoulder and shot almost backhanded—"and by shooting across his body it made it impossible for him to shoot while going to his left."

Johnny's mother soon had the dining room table heaped with homemade food. I gathered a plateful and found a seat next to several of Johnny's boyhood friends. "J.D. is a beautiful dude, man," said Craig Simpson, who also grew up in the Brewster projects. "He remembers his roots. Like, tonight he was playing against Eric Money. Sometimes you can go up to Eric and he's forgotten you. Everytime Johnny comes into town he spends time at the Recreation Center with the people he grew up with. There's some heavy shit going down there . . . people strung out, junkies and stuff like that, but Johnny's never too busy."

"The point is...just to be for real, to have a good heart, to be good people"

Simpson got some more food, then continued. "Anytime there was trouble when we were kids, Johnny would let it go by him. I've only seen him in one fight in my whole life. He and this dude started out having a play fight, you know, and all of a sudden this dude started taking it for real. When Johnny realized the dude was serious, he tapped on the dude, man, and that was it."

Davis had called his mother "the foundation" and I asked her what kind of principles she had instilled in her son. "My philosophy—and this is what I've always taught my kids even though I've been contradicted—is that what is for you in this world, you will get. You don't have to worry about it . . . nobody in this world can take it away from you. Now there are some people who tell me, 'No, if you want to get it you've got to go out there for it.' But I've seen too many cases where we went out there for it and didn't get it. And too many cases where we didn't go out there for it and it came to us.

"When John wasn't playing much last year, I told him, 'Your time will come . . . and it will come when it will count most. And sure enough it did."

Around 1:30 in the morning, the party began to break up.

Davis dropped his teammates off at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, then headed back toward my hotel, saying, "You know, I love this, having my friends and all watching me play. This is what it's all about. You can't burn bridges behind you. I have a lot of good friends still in the Brewster project. The people there are personable people. It doesn't matter to me what they do. I have real good friends there that don't work, period. The point is . . . just to be for real, to have a good heart, to be good people. It doesn't matter what your livelihood is or what clothes you wear as long as you are good from within."

Jack Ramsay and the Trail Blazers were sprawled across the floor of Portland's Memorial Coliseum doing stretching exercises prior to practicing before that evening's game with the Philadelphia 76ers. The last time the two teams had met, three months before in Philadelphia, the Sixers had trounced Portland, 122-100, the Blazers' worst defeat of the season.

Ramsay next ran the Blazers through some three-man weave drills up and down the court until they had worked up a sweat. Then he and McKinney went over the Philadelphia plays and player moves the Blazers might expect tonight. He reminded Bob Gross, for example, of the way Julius Erving likes to take two quick steps to fake cutting across the lane, then double back to free himself for an inside pass. McKinney reminded Lloyd Neal how Steve Mix likes to get a pick at the foul line and drive to the hoop. Then McKinney took time explaining to Davis a play Philadelphia uses where a screen and a pass from Doug Collins set up Lloyd Free for an easy shot from the left wing.

"Remember, always try to keep Free going to his left," McKinney told Davis. "If he goes left, he has to push you and fall back to take his shot. If he goes right, he concentrates only on his shot."

The Sixers' Free and Davis are an interesting abstract NBA equation. "For what we ask Johnny to contribute here and for what they ask Free to contribute there, the two are in comparable situations," the Blazers' vice-president, Stu Inman, had told me the day before.

Both are young guards—Free has one year more pro experience than Davis—who had developed their games in the city, Davis in Detroit, Free in New York. Both are small guards with great

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Johnny Davis

quickness, speed and leaping ability. Both are third guards coming off the bench who see about equal playing time on the teams with the two best records in the NBA this season.

Free was a self-proclaimed "All-World" player given to self-aggrandizing statements and irrepressible long-range bombing, a man who touted his abilities and his future as limitless and was outspoken in demanding more playing time, claiming he would not be treated like "a yo-yo" (see "The seething Sixers," page 14).

Davis has had to work for years on his outside shooting. Ramsay had called it his biggest weakness last season.

As far as the Blazers' organization was concerned, it seemed that Davis' future was not limitless. Davis was not a complete ballplayer yet, team officials said. "John is unique in that he is a 6-1 off-guard," Inman had told me. "He's not a true lead guard. I think Calvin Murphy would be roughly in that category . . . a very small guard who doesn't really lead it and can never lead it. He is in the category loosely called a spot player, but he is more of a specialist who does certain things extremely well, other things adequately. He's not a particularly gifted passer . . . not a great shooter . . . not a very good scorer. I don't ever see him being an All-Star guard. My projection for John Davis down the line is that he will be mainly a 20-minute-a-game player. And I think he accepts his role."

Davis again started in place of Twardzik, so he didn't play against Free in the first quarter, which Free spent mostly on the bench. Davis used his speed and quickness to help give Portland a first-period lead. He twice shed Bibby's guarding and scooted inside down the lane where Walton fed him for a couple of baskets.

When Davis missed three outside shots at the start of the third quarter, the 76ers were able to close their deficit to nine points. Early in the period, the Sixers' Doug Collins came roaring downcourt and slammed into Davis, drawing an offensive foul. A few minutes later, Collins again broke down the lane and rammed Davis. Another offensive foul. The volatile Collins exploded, drew a technical and was removed from the game. Collins made one other basket the rest of the game (Davis drew another charging foul on him in the fourth quarter) and wound up with ten points.

As for Lloyd Free, he drove to his right only one time all game . . . around Hollins for a three-point play. Free, who had been averaging nearly 22 points a game in his last five contests, shot four for 15 from the field.

When Collins and Free tried to press Portland late in the game, Davis flew between and around them. Davis topped all the Blazers with 43 minutes played. He shot five of 12 from the field and totaled 12 points as the Trail Blazers blew out the Sixers, 113-92.

After the game, we hopped into Davis' Datsun 280Z and drove to his two-bedroom garden apartment. It was nearly bare, except for a couch, a coffee table, a stack of records and a stereo on the floor. Davis got a can of lemonade from the refrigerator and said, "That Collins is good, but he's a little excitable, isn't he? He blew up after that charging foul, took himself right out of the game."

"What's going to happen when Twardzik is healed and Ramsay sits you back down on the bench?" I asked. "Won't you be disappointed?"

"I'll gladly do it," he said. "I'll have no second thoughts about it. The bottom line is to win. And we're all 11 of us in it together. I'm still learning a lot of things . . . when to go all the way . . . when to pull up and shoot . . . when to wait for the team on the break.

"If I get the ball, just 'cause I can beat my guy doesn't mean I will. It's not always the best thing to keep driving past a guy. It's not a one-on-one game. We don't play that way. Even when I played in the playground I believed that the cats playing together were gonna win. I've also got to learn to use my quickness on defense. . . . I'm hesitant because they call so many fouls—"

"—And you don't want to sit on the bench because part of your salary is based on minutes played?" I said.

"It's not the money," he said. "When it all averages out, the money is insignificant. When you sit on the bench you can't help your team."

"But let's face it, Johnny, do you think the team does that much for you?" I asked. "If they ran any kind of plays for you or let you take any more shots you could be scoring more. They don't make much use of the things you can do on offense."

"Listen," Davis said. "In order to have a winning ballclub, each guy on the team has to sacrifice. That builds character. You sometimes have to sacrifice one thing or another for the good of the whole. If you have selfish guys on the club, I don't think you'll ever have a championship team."

Davis sat back sipping his lemonade. I recalled a tribute Inman had paid him the previous day, a genuine feeling of love which I had read in the eyes of some of Davis' teammates. "When my time comes to leave this earth," Stu Inman had said, "and ten people flash through my mind, John Davis may be one of them." ■

SPORT TALK

(Continued from page 8)

To keep his stats up-to-the-minute, Pollack gets 22 newspapers a day—one for each NBA city—for research and clipping. A special mailman delivers them to Harvey's home each morning—and a special trashman collects the debris. The papers are not used for gleaning boxscores (each team sends two copies to every other team after each game), but are mined for the data in the game stories—like fights.

On road trips, Harvey brings the papers along to clip—and makes such a mess on the plane that players refuse to sit next to him. Once, Harvey wasn't allowed on a flight because his scissors were above "lethal weapon" size.

Often, just to catch up, Harvey works weekdays until midnight, and next morning on the commuter train. "I come in with the same two girls every morning. One keeps the good clips, one keeps the trash," Harvey says. "Some guys go home after work and watch TV, but not me. You gotta put in a lot of hours, and *number one*, you gotta have the *desire*!"

Some who don't, according to Harvey, are other league PR men who save only their own team's boxscore and discard the rest. Horrified, Harvey says: "These guys are throwing 'em in the wastebasket! So the last time I was in Houston, on a road trip, I went right after those stats . . . coffee grinds were there, and every goddamn thing. But when I left, I was up to date."

—L.A.

CONDITIONS AND COMMENTS

■ Houston Aeros center Andre LaCroix, the World Hockey Association's all-time leading scorer, on the controversial separatist movement in his native Quebec: "I love Canada and I want to see it stay united. I can sympathize with the people of Quebec, because they don't want to lose their French culture. But separatism would destroy Quebec economically."

■ Harry "the Hat" Walker, hitting expert and Cardinal scout, after watching Cincinnati's George Foster hit his third home run in one spring training game: "I don't know why people like the home run so much. The triple is the most exciting play in the game. It's like sex. A home run is just slam, bam, thank you ma'am. It's over as soon as it starts. But a triple is like meeting a woman who excites you, spending the evening talking and getting more excited, then taking her home. It drags on and you're never sure how it's gonna turn out until it happens."

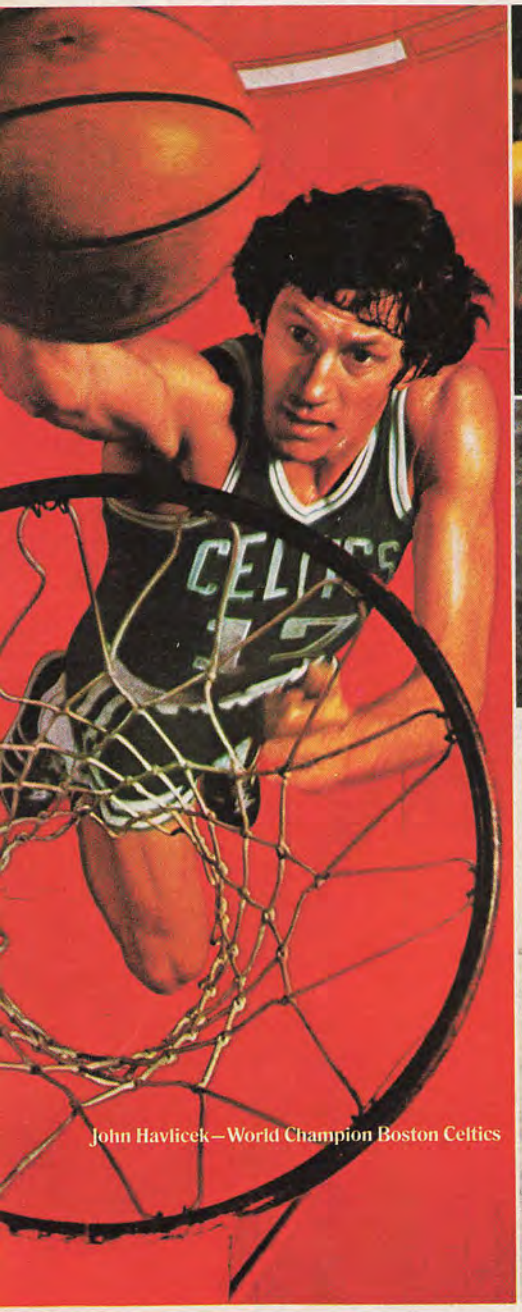
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This gringo's high on jai-alai

Kirby Prater is one of a handful of Americans competing in the fast-paced, fast-growing sport dominated by Basques who run two miles in each night's play. They stay in shape by smoking, drinking—and exercising as little as possible

by DONALD DALE JACKSON

The hard little ball cracked off the high wall and flew at Kirby Prater's expressionless face with the velocity of a Reggie Jackson line drive. Prater calmly dipped his knees and caught the ball in the crescent-shaped wicker-basket *cesta* on his right hand, then whipped the ball low and fast at the corner where the front and side walls met. The ball caromed off the two walls and spun into the screen for a winner.

"Way to go, four," a fan yelled.

"Kirby, you're hot!" screamed another.

On the next point Prater leaped high to snag a shot that hugged the cement side wall, but missed. His doubles partner, a Spanish Basque named Ayerdi, deftly plucked the ball from an inch off the floor in the backcourt and fired it back. Prater snared the return, then—with a short touch-shot that bounced so low it was unreturnable—won the point. A baseball player would call it a bunt, a

Prater, leaping high on this return, says getting hit with a hard jai-alai ball is "like a football player getting blindsided."

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Jai-alai

tennis player a drop shot. Prater, the lone gringo professional jai-alai player at the Milford, Conn., *fronton*, called it a *dejada*.

"I saw a guy get hit in the jaw with a ball the first night I played as a pro," Prater said after he came off the court. "It made an awful sound; there's no sound like bone shattering. I thought, 'Jesus, is this what it is to be a pro?' The noise was so loud I heard it in the glassed-in players' booth. I went white.

"If you get hit in the muscles with that hard rubber ball, it leaves a mark like nothing else. It's a black-and-blue ring around a white circle. There's always a risk, but you don't think about it. It's like a football player getting blindsided."

The Miami-born, 29-year-old Prater is an aberration, a stranger in a Spanish village. Curly-haired Basques, who live on the Bay of Biscay between France and Spain, have names like Malax and Uribar and Elorza and play jai-alai from childhood, flinging handball-sized *pelotas* (balls) against the stone walls around the old plazas. Green-eyed, narrow-hipped American boys like Prater play flanker or shortstop. But he was different.

"I started about ten years ago," Prater recalls. "I learned on the public courts in North Miami. I used to go to the Miami fronton every night and watch Churruca; he plays at Bridgeport now. I'd do a little betting. I figured I could play this game. It cost $1.25 an hour to play. I paid for it by hustling pool at night and working as a lifeguard days. I played every day for a couple of years and got good enough that I was in the world amateur tournament in southern France, where a scout saw me." For a while Prater ran his own furniture-making business in Miami. "Then I was offered a pro contract and I took it."

Prater's sentences tend to start in valleys and end in the foothills, so that statements sound like questions. He is poker-faced both on the court and off, with a slow, sly smile and an almost inaudible laugh. At 5 feet 11 and 180 pounds, with good speed, coordination and reflexes, he would have excelled at any sport. He blames a high-school coach for stunting a potential career in football. "I tried out for the JV when I weighed about 130," he recalls. "I scored in a scrimmage, then the coach put me in the middle of the circle drill and gave me the ball. I dodged two guys, then he called to this big dude who was right behind me. He threw me down and broke my arm. I quit football right there. Sometimes I think I might have made it as a safety."

Kirby Prater plays jai-alai under his first name; like Liberace and Pelé, jai-alai players use only one name. As a relatively junior player, Prater earns slightly less than $2,000 a month—plus bonuses for finishing in the money—during the six-month season. He and the rest of the 43-man Milford roster play the other half-year in Florida. In Connecticut he shares a house on the shore of Long Island Sound with two other single *pelotaris*. One day he tried to teach his Basque roommate how to play basketball in a Milford schoolyard. "These guys are such good athletes I figured he'd pick it right up," he says. "But he played soccer style. He made one basket with his head and kicked another one in." Basquetball.

The cultural confrontation has worked better in the other direction. "I was at this shopping center in Milford and I saw these kids, 11 or 12 years old, playing jai-alai against the wall of a department store," Prater says. "They had the white pants, numbered shirts, some even had red sashes like we wear." Ingenious Bridgeport kids have improvised *cestas* out of bicycle fenders and reinforced cardboard.

"One night the fans started on me: 'Kirby, you stink!' I wasn't even playing"

The Basques, who were dropped into Connecticut in 1976 like a flock of transplanted flamingos, have stamped their style on their new terrain. "We took the whole bunch for a day in New York one Sunday," says Bob Beslove, public relations director for the Bridgeport fronton. "We all sat down to this Chinese meal and one guy, Ondarres, starts looking for the bread. Well, all they had were those noodles, you know. A Basque can't eat without bread, so he runs out into the street and buys a loaf of bread and some wine. Then they ate their Chinese dinner."

John Knox of the Milford fronton remembers another instance of Basque accommodation. "This happened a few years ago in Florida. A doctor brought a bottle containing about 5,000 aspirin tablets into the lockerroom. The Basques asked what they were for and he said 'aches and pains.' Well, after a day the doctor noticed that the bottle was about a quarter down. Two days later there were only 500 aspirins left. He asked what was going on and they took him to the whirlpool bath. They were throwing the aspirins in and bathing in them. The Basques said it helped their aches and pains."

Jai-alai Connecticut style has 12 matches a night, ten doubles and two singles, with eight contestants or teams in each match. They play in rotation, the winner remaining on court, until one team scores seven points and the cashiers pay off for win, place, show and the various combination bets. Connecticut and jai-alai appear to be a marriage made in the boardroom. Over two million bettors wagered more than $150 million at the Bridgeport fronton in one year; Connecticut's tax bite was more than $8 million. Frontons at Hartford and Milford soon followed.

The game demands hair-trigger reflexes, judgment, stamina and courage. A jai-alai player may run two miles a night during his turns on the concrete court. The Basques stay in shape by smoking, drinking, eating everything they can reach and exercising as little as possible off court.

"They'll put away a steak before they play at night," says Knox, "and have a feast when they finish." The Bridgeport players quickly zeroed in on a wholesale fish market, where they buy—like they eat—in bulk, and passed on the discovery to their colleagues at Milford. Shopping in an alien tongue is no problem for a Basque with a good eye. "We see steak in store," one player explained, "we buy steak." Their favorite drink is rum-and-Coke, a taste acquired by the older players in pre-Castro Cuba.

The effect of all this gracious living is not unnoticed by spectators, particularly recent losers. "Look at the gut on number six," is the way one Milford bettor put it. Several other players had Pierre Salinger paunches.

Prater says the look is deceptive. "Some of these guys are just built that way, and it doesn't seem to slow them down," he said. "The game is in the legs, and they can play as long as their legs keep going." Any suggestion that they jog or otherwise exercise their legs is treated as impertinent. "We run *plenty* on court," said one Basque.

They also sleep plenty. With three matinees and six night sessions a week, they can use the rest. Professor Leonard Bloom of Bridgeport University, a Basque language scholar who gave English lessons to several players, asked one what he did on Sunday. "He said he got up about 11:30, ate breakfast and went back to sleep. He woke up at four and watched sports on television a while, then went back to bed. He got up at ten, had dinner, then hit the sack."

Most of the Basque players are married and have their families with them. They often live in clusters of neighboring houses or in the same apartment house—Basque islands in Yankee land. They are churchgoing family men, con-

servative and somewhat shy, less gregarious than other Latins. "They're not like most other professional athletes," says Beslove. "They're more mature, more under control, and it wears off from the older guys onto the younger ones. I was driving one player to the airport and he suddenly said, 'I am so much in love.' " Beslove's eyebrows rise. "He was talking about his wife."

Female fans avidly pursue unattached jai-alai players. "There's something about them," says one girl. "They look so shy but they're funny and sweet." A swinging Bridgeport player named Castro was so sought-after that girls were frequently parked outside his apartment house when he got home from a match. He was forced to sneak in side doors and to change his phone number. Castro complained, Basque-like, that most of the girls he met were "too experienced."

What most impresses Prater about each of his married teammates is the way they run their homes—as male chauvinists. "The wife does everything for him," Prater says. "He's like their God. That appeals to me. And he's the only man she's ever been with, you know? He goes home and dinner's ready. He lies down, gets up and eats. He doesn't have to worry about anything except playing."

The Basque beachhead in Connecticut was smoothed considerably by Beslove, a fast-talking PR man who affects black shirts and a barely contained, side-of-the-mouth manner, as if he had just moved uptown and hadn't yet learned where the salad fork goes. Beslove trotted his players out for every civic and charitable occasion he could find. They passed out *cestas* to crippled children. They carved the Thanksgiving turkey at an old folks' home. "They risked their arms bowling for muscular dystrophy," he says proudly. "*Risked those valuable arms.* And never a complaint. They never said no."

When a player was married, Beslove lined up the other players like West Point cadets while bride and groom marched under an arch of crossed *cestas*. When a baby Basque first opened its eyes in a Bridgeport hospital, Beslove saw to it that the infant was photographed in a *cesta*. A group of wives were formed into a dance company—"The Basquettes," of course. ("If you start with the wives," one player warned, him "you coo-coo.") When a jai-alai fan wrote from Las Vegas politely inquiring if he could bring his Aramayo Fan Club banner to Bridgeport, did Beslove say yes? By all means, amigo, and pronto.

The most inspired PR stroke of all, however, appears suspiciously spontaneous, though with Beslove one is never certain. "We had a farewell party for the whole roster just before the end of last season," says Beslove's assistant, Kathy Graham, "and the players started to sing. They all knew the same songs, and they were terrific singers, harmony and everything. They sang for two hours. They were so good everyone thought they must have rehearsed." It took Beslove about 14 seconds to book the jai-alai chorale for closing night at the fronton. The song they chose was "Boga Boga," which has something to do with whaling boats leaving home. "People wept," Beslove says.

"We do the relations because it is good for the players," says Bridgeport players' manager Ricardo Sotil. "I do because I am Basque, and people here want to know what is that. We want them to love Basque people. We like doing it." He smiles broadly, and adds, "Also is good for go into business later."

"Listen to this," Beslove chirps, unable to contain himself. "Next season starts in November, right? So I'm thinking maybe the players ought to arrive here by ship on October 12th. What day is that? *Columbus Day*. What ship do you think they'll arrive on? No, not the *Santa Maria*—the *Christopher Columbus*. Huh? Whaddaya think?"

A baby Basque born in Bridgeport is photographed in a cesta

Up the pike a piece at Milford, where Prater plays, the attitude is precisely the opposite. There is no Beslove there. "We don't merchandise our players," John Knox says. "If they get too familiar and too commercial, then everybody thinks they've got an angle. McDonald's wanted them for an opening but I said no."

At the fronton the players are separated from the audience by a metal screen that keeps out people but not their voices. "If this is a zoo, then we're the monkeys," said Prater. "The other night the fans got a bit rowdy at one of the judge's calls. I looked out at them and they started on me, you know, 'Kirby, you stink,' that sort of thing, and I wasn't even playing. I felt like yelling, 'Hey, I didn't do nothing.' "

We were sitting in a screen-protected booth where players watch the action when they're not playing. "Barracuda, you're a bum!" a fan screamed at a player named Bereicua. "Take a shower!" a woman yelled. When a shot went low, below the red band about tennis-net-high on the far wall, a glee club of losing bettors booed. The players eyed the crowd without emotion.

"Sometimes you look around when you go out the door at night," Prater said. "There were three guys in the front row making faces at me one night, calling me names. I got in my car and saw what looked like the same guys waiting in a car by our gate. I came up behind them and honked my horn and they took off. You can usually pick out a drunken heckler yelling your name. If he yells on every point, he's drunk."

A Basque player came in and slapped Prater on the shoulder. "You play good tonight, Kirby," he said. "Thanks, Horse," said Prater, who then explained: "We call him Crazy Horse." Others are nicknamed Butterfly, Squid and El Toro. A long-nosed player is called Chato (Short Nose).

"The fix is in!" a fan screamed. The players in the booth ignored him.

The suggestion that they might cheat or throw a point is taken as an affront to Basque pride. "Sometimes they make the boo when they lose money," says manager Sotil, "but is wrong." "You angry with yourself and they yell," says a Basque named Echano, "it makes you feel worse."

"These are proud men with their own code of honor," says Leonard Bloom, the Basque scholar. "They don't cheat or play dirty. They'd be ostracized if they did. Their code is *jugar bien*–to play well, to play the game properly."

"They never complain or show pain," Prater says. "That guy I saw get his jaw shattered was back by the end of the season."

Prater sometimes seems like a good old American manchild-jock who somehow got mixed up with a bunch of sober-sided deacons. The Basques play the game because it's a living. Prater plays because it's fun. The Basques drink rum and drive station wagons and take their families on church picnics. Prater drinks beer and drives a motorcycle and runs on the beach and enjoys life as a professional jai-alai player. "I have no complaints," he says. "If I did, I'd just keep my mouth shut. I want to play ten years, so I don't bitch."

Later, in his match and one point away from losing, Prater raced across the forecourt to retrieve an angled shot heading for the screen. He caught the ball but hurled it too high in trying for a carom, and it landed out of bounds. As Prater walked off the court, a fan shouted, "Kirby, you make me *sick!*" Kirby Prater glanced at the screen and smiled his sly smile. "I'm not crazy about you either," he said softly. ■

Inside baseball's greatest



When these teams collide, the players on both sides are often stirred to magnificent heights. Here the players discuss those tension-filled confrontations. Says the Dodgers' Steve Garvey: "You can never let up against the Reds." Says the Reds' Pete Rose: "I always bust my ass to win, but with the Dodgers I do it a little more"

by MAURY ALLEN

It was a game all the Los Angeles Dodgers would long remember: a perfect June night in Cincinnati, soft and mild, and 51,864 people marched through the gates of Riverfront Stadium ready to participate with hearts and hands and voices in the evening's activities. They came to see Tom Seaver—rescued only nine days earlier from the tyranny of M. Donald Grant (the New York Mets' chairman of the board)—the super pitcher who was making his home debut as a Red.

The Dodgers had had the fastest April start in baseball history, winning 17 of 20 games, and had built a lead of 13½ games by late May. Now they showed signs of stumbling, the gap cut to 8½ games over Cincinnati, amid rumblings that the defending world champion Reds, with Seaver, were ready to make their move.

This June 24, 1977 game—Seaver going against Tommy John, Pete Rose vs. Ron Cey, Joe Morgan vs. Dave Lopes, George Foster vs. Dusty Baker, Tommy Lasorda vs. Sparky Anderson, the Reds vs. the Dodgers—was a key confrontation in the best rivalry in the National League.

Except for 1971, when the San Francisco Giants had somehow sneaked in, the Reds or Dodgers had been the National League West winners every year in this decade. They had dominated the All-Star teams, played to more than three million people against each other, set attendance records and conjured up memories of what it was like when the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants bitterly contested for the favor of New Yorkers.

"I was jittery," remembers Seaver of that night. "It was a big game for us. We were getting some momentum. They seemed to be slipping. It was early in the season. We could still catch them."

In one of baseball's classic rites, Seaver was allowed to sit alone while the storm swirled around him. He poked at a crossword puzzle. He tugged at his new Cincinnati jersey with the large number 41 over his heart. He walked in and out of the trainer's room. The visiting press from Los Angeles and, for this special occasion, from New York

rivalry: Dodgers vs. Reds



and Pittsburgh and Chicago and St. Louis and Montreal, walked past him, offering a small comment here, getting a slight response there, nothing momentous, nothing significant, all of the serious questions and answers being saved for after the fact.

In the Dodger clubhouse sat Tommy John, the bionic pitcher whose left elbow had been rebuilt with a tendon from his right forearm. He was again winning games for the Dodgers. "I remember the game vividly," John recalls. "The press, the crowd, the tension in the park, the excitement. You could feel it. I knew I shouldn't get any higher for the Reds and Seaver than I did for anybody else. I knew I simply had to be good because they were good. I remember when I was in the American League and I watched Whitey Ford pitch. I always tried to emulate him before a big game, always at ease, thinking ahead, studying the hitters. When we go against the Reds I often think of sitting on the bench with the White Sox next to [manager] Eddie Stanky. He would quiz me about the team we were playing. 'How many RBIs did Al Kaline have yesterday? When did Norm Cash hit his last home run? Who is their best bunter? Concentrate, concentrate.' I learned that from Eddie. I thank him for it."

In the Cincinnati clubhouse Sparky Anderson sits in his office and fiddles with his lineup card. He removes his baseball cap, rubs his long, bony fingers through a shock of white hair, then writes Seaver's name on the card first, in the ninth spot.

"That's nice to do," he says.

It all comes back to him now, months later, when he is asked about the Reds and Dodgers rivalry.

"I look forward to playing them," he says. "You can tell a couple of days ahead when we are going into a series with them. The players talk more about them. They ask more about our pitching rotation. The Dodgers came in here that June night thinking they were kings. They got off so well. We knew we probably had to take three games out of four to hurt them. We knew that would be so hard. They are good, very good. I thought about managing against Tommy Lasorda. We are old friends. We played in the Dodger chain together. Now he was the manager up here. I hadn't seen him work. I didn't know how he used his bullpen, how he used his pinch-hitters, when he ran and when he didn't. I had to think about that a little more."

DODGERS	REDS
1. Tom Lasorda	9. Tom Seaver
2. Tommy John	10. Joe Morgan
3. Dave Lopes	11. Johnny Bench
4. Steve Garvey	12. Ken Griffey
5. Ron Cey	13. George Foster
6. Steve Yeager	14. Dave Concepcion
7. Don Sutton	15. Sparky Anderson
8. Reggie Smith	16. Pete Rose

Lasorda had come to the Dodgers' top field job as a natural extension of 32 years of loyal service to the organization, of hustling in the boondocks for promising kids, of scouting players from Maine to Alaska, of managing in the bus leagues and coaching in the big leagues. He had brought unbridled enthusiasm, warmth and emotion to a team that had been dominated by manager Walter Alston's slow, cool, placid style for 23 years. Lasorda had invoked the muse, the Big Dodger in the Sky, the Blue Wrecking Crew, Dodger Blue flowing in his veins, Frank Sinatra, Don Rickles, Gregory Peck sitting in Dodger Stadium

seats, the gung-ho spirit of high-school kids coming from his $300,000-a-year players.

"That's me," says Lasorda. "I gave them my full personality. I love the Dodgers."

Then he thought about his early days as a Dodger, saying, "I was a lefthanded kid pitcher in the organization and they told me we had to beat the Giants; no matter what else we did up there, we had to beat the Giants. We hated them; we really hated them. This isn't like that. There is mutual respect with the Reds.

"I remember playing with Sparky on the Dodger farm clubs in Los Angeles in 1957 and in Montreal in 1958," Lasorda continues. "He was a tough second baseman, a leader, a fighter, a holler guy, a captain on the field, a tremendous competitor. I had aspirations for managing but lefthanded pitchers don't manage. I think Eddie Lopat was the only lefthanded pitcher to become a manager in the last 50 years. But it was a dream. Then I made it."

The Dodgers were playing the Reds in a '77 spring training exhibition game and Lasorda remembers watching Anderson watch eight Dodger starters running together in their ritualistic pregame exercise.

"Look at Sparky," Lasorda told his players. "He knows his guys will be chasing you all year."

Sparky was laughing at the togetherness of Lasorda's team. "Those eight guys," Anderson told his players, "by September, they'll be running in eight different directions."

"Sparky was right," Lasorda says now, "by September, they were running to eight different banks."

Now it was game time on that June night last year. The Dodgers put runners on second and third in the first inning and first baseman Steve Garvey slapped a Seaver fastball into leftfield for two runs.

"I changed my pattern that night against Seaver," says Garvey. "I usually like to take a pitch or two to see how his velocity is, to see if he has good control. I could see he was a little shaky. I jumped on the first pitch. I knew I might never see another one after he settled down."

"Garvey is a good hitter," says Seaver. "He has to hit my best pitch. It was down and in. He went out and got it."

Rick Monday singled in the sixth inning for another run. The Reds rallied for two in the seventh, but the bionic pitcher was too much. The Dodgers won 3-2, and went on to win the Western Division title by ten games.

"You can never let up when you play Cincinnati," Garvey says. "Every hitter is a threat. Every pitcher is tough. Seaver can blow you away with the hard stuff. Then little Fred Norman will slip a curveball in the dirt and you'll go for it. They are especially tough in Riverfront with the artificial turf. They all hit down on the ball and run.

"The guy who has hurt us most has been Dave Concepcion," says the Dodger first baseman. "He will slap an inside pitch down the third-base line or punch the outside fastball over my head to right."

"The Reds are a lot like us," says Dodger catcher Steve Yeager, "in that they like to hit the ball out of the park. Joe Morgan is always looking for an inside pitch to jerk. George Foster is so strong. Pete Rose sprays it all over. Johnny Bench will pull anything. They all have a weakness—the trick is to find it. Even Ted Williams had a weakness. Once in a while they'll fool you. Bench might bunt for a surprise. Morgan will go the other way. When Morgan gets on base, you know he'll run. The pitcher has to hold him close. That's his job."

"Don't give Bench a high pitch. Move it around on Rose. Pitch Griffey high"

After that June loss to the Dodgers, Pete Rose—who had lost a day in his relentless pursuit of the National League career-hit record (Stan Musial's 3,630) with 0 for four—drove home to Oak Hills in silence. He did not hear the hum of his car engine or the passing traffic. He heard only the snap of Tommy John's fastball just below his fists, cracking into Steve Yeager's glove.

"Rose is such a good hitter," John says, "that you must try to get him to go for a bad ball. He'll hit good stuff anywhere. I always work to get ahead on the count on him. He'll punch the outside pitch or pull the inside pitch. Change of speeds and change of location are a must with him. He is always guessing with the pitcher."

Most of all that night, Rose remembered the two-run single Garvey had pulled past him into leftfield. "You have to protect the lines against Garvey," Rose says. "He hits the ball where it's pitched and he hits it hard."

Pete's family was asleep when he reached home. "I went in to kiss my little girl Fawn," he recalls. "And there, on her wall, was this big picture of Steve Garvey. He is her favorite player. How could I hate him? And my son Petey, one of his favorite people in baseball is Tommy Lasorda. Tommy treats Petey like his own son." Rose shrugs.

For all the intensity of the Reds-Dodgers rivalry, there is warmth and admiration for the opposing players.

"In spring training," says Dodger pitcher Don Sutton, "my son Daron, he's eight, goes over and sits on the Cincinnati bench. He loves Rose and Morgan and Bench. He comes up to me before a game in Florida against them and says, 'Daddy, let them get a hit.' He knows they win. I think I'm raising a front-runner. At least during the season he lets me do it my own way."

"Sutton will change speeds, throw that big curve and try to sneak that fast one by you," says Reds second baseman Joe Morgan. "He isn't afraid to push you off the plate with his fastball either."

"When Morgan is up you have to be alert," says Dodger rightfielder Reggie Smith. "He will hit the ball all over. You have to protect the line but you have to watch for the line drive in the gap. Joe likes to take a pitcher downtown, but if he slaps a ball in the alley, he'll make three out of it if you give him the least little chance."

Smith says he looks forward to playing the Reds, because he knows he'll have to face Tom Seaver—the best pitcher in the league.

"I've been around a long time," says Smith, who was a Boston Red Sox rookie in 1966. "There are three main men: Sandy Koufax, Bob Gibson and Seaver. They could all blow you away. What makes Seaver great is that you know you have to hit his best fastball in the eighth and ninth innings. He'll never let up. It's his power against yours."

"The atmosphere is more intense," says Pete Rose. "I always bust my ass to win, but with the Dodgers I do it a little more. That's why I'm glad we got Seaver now. Maybe he'll keep those guys from beating us with homers."

"I don't think any pitcher can keep our club from hitting some home runs," says Garvey, who was one of four Dodgers to hit 30 or more last year. "We even get one once in a while off Seaver. I remember when he was pitching for the Mets last year. He threw a fastball inside that was a little higher than he would have liked. He missed and I hit it out. My wife was listening to the game on the radio. She was so excited she dropped a chocolate cake she was baking."

Dodger second baseman Dave Lopes says he tries to play exactly the same against the Reds as against anybody else. He does admit that at times the atmosphere makes it appear "as if it were the seventh game of the World



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Series."

Lopes, one of the game's premier base-stealers, says he avoids personal rivalries between himself and Morgan. "I know he'll steal and he knows I'll steal," Lopes says. "I don't think of it in personal terms. I think of it simply as the Dodgers against the Reds."

"Gil Hodges taught me never to get too high for any one club," says Tom Seaver. "When I was a young player with the Mets, I would get up for the Dodgers because I was pitching in front of my family and friends and the other clubs would beat me on my next start. I've learned to deal with that now. I'm a mature pitcher. I understand pitching is a creative art, each game equally important, each performance demanding total effort."

Dodger Stadium, with its beautiful setting and the fact that visiting teams never know what they might witness there, fills some Reds with anticipation before every series in Los Angeles.

"I like going out to Los Angeles and playing them," says first baseman Dan Driessen, the latest in the long line of Cincinnati hitting fools. "Everything is exciting out there. I want to do everything right. The park is always sold out, I always have friends and family there, I always get a kick out of the show-business stars and the people you see. One day I came on the field and the Dodgers were taking batting practice. There was a tall guy in the cage. I checked him out. It was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar taking batting practice with the Dodgers. Where else you gonna see that?"

On the walls of Tommy Lasorda's office are pictures of the Dodger manager with his legion of show-business friends, over here Frank and Tommy, over there Rickles and Tommy, in this corner Gregory Peck and Tommy, even a baseball picture of Ted Williams, Mickey Mantle and Tommy.

"The big guys always come out to see us and the Reds," Lasorda says. "Frank hadn't been to the park for years. Then we played the Reds. He said, 'Hey, Tommy, I gotta come out tonight, can you help me with four?' I remind my guys that they are performers like Sinatra, that they owe the fans their best performance every time they go out there. It's a show, a great show and I love it. Hey, did I tell you about Harvey Korman? He calls me during the winter and says if I don't get four season tickets for him and put his picture up on my office wall he'll never talk to me again. Imagine that! Me, just an old lefthanded pitcher from Norristown, Pa."

Lasorda says he doesn't believe in team meetings before a big series, but he does go over the Reds' hitters with his pitchers and catchers. "They're all pros," the Dodger manager says. "I just remind them of certain things: Don't give Bench a high pitch he can hit out. Move it around on Rose. Pitch Ken Griffey high so he has trouble beating the ball into the ground. Try to make George Foster go for a bad ball."

All players mentally prepare for the confrontations.

"I know we have to beat them to win," says Dodger third baseman Ron Cey. "We must be totally prepared when we play them. I know what they do. I guard the line against Rose a little tighter because I know he likes to slap the ball over the bag. Except for Griffey, they will rarely bunt. In their park with the artificial turf, I play back a step. In our park with grass, I can move up a step.

"It's a lot of fun when we play them. I enjoy every game. I look forward to Cincinnati because I know we'll have a packed house, an enthusiastic crowd and a great game." Cey smiled. "But it would have been nice if Seaver had been





traded out of the league."

George Foster says it is not any Dodger player that concerns him. "The man I compete against is George Foster," he says. "I try to be consistent. I try to set goals for myself and reach and pass them. I want to be the best ballplayer I can possibly be. I can only do that if I reach out higher and higher above myself."

Foster, who may be the best all-round hitter in baseball today, says he does study one Dodger carefully: "Steve Garvey, a great hitter—strong, smart, consistent. Look at the man's record. Every year, 200 hits, a .300 average, a lot of home runs and RBIs: consistency. That's what hitting is all about, and why I like to watch him hit."

"How do I play Foster?" asks Garvey. "Deep, very deep. Nobody in the game can hit a ball harder than George Foster. I want to be ready if one of those shots comes at me."

In Foster's years with the Reds, the Dodgers have had the better pitching. The Reds must overcome this edge with offense and speed.

"All the Dodger pitchers give me trouble," says Foster. "Sutton with that big curve, John with his smart pitching, Rick Rhoden, all of them. On our team we have great balance. No pitcher can beat us by stopping one guy, me or Bench or Rose or Morgan or Griffey. If one guy has an off day, another guy picks him up."

"Everybody was talking about a Reds' dynasty when we first saw them in spring training in 1977," Lasorda says with a wry smile. "I guess we got in the way of the dynasty."

"That was only one year," says Morgan. "I'll be having a better year in 1978. I want to win again. Tell the Dodgers that. We took them too lightly. We thought we could turn it on anytime and catch them. We were wrong.

"But I always get up a little extra for the Dodgers. I know I can run on any of their pitchers. I try to upset them. There must be more preparation to play them because they are a fundamentally sound team. They don't make many mistakes. They play well together. They execute all the plays. They play tough defense.

"I know we'll beat them, though, no matter who is pitching for them. I don't believe the old line that good pitching stops good hitting. I'm a hitter, we all are on the Reds, and I believe good hitting stops good pitching. In Los Angeles we usually bomb them when we beat them [37 runs in nine games last season]. In Cincinnati, with our artificial turf, it's more defense and speed. Tommy John beat us four times last year. I think we swung at too many bad balls against him. I don't think that will happen again."

So the best rivalry in baseball, the finest the sport has to offer in the 1970s, shows no signs of letting up in the final two years of the decade.

"I think it's great," says bubbling Tommy Lasorda. "It's something that helps us, helps the Reds, helps the National League and helps all baseball. I don't know if you will see a dynasty like the old Yankees anymore, but the Dodgers and the Reds are the closest thing to it now. I know we have to beat them to get into the Fall Classic. I can't wait. I want to take on my friend Billy Martin again."

The ordeal begins with the first matchup of the spring—with the first close encounter between a Don Sutton fastball and Pete Rose's aggressive stance, with the first tantalizing curveball that Tommy John throws George Foster, with the first line-drive single or the first home run Ron Cey cracks, with the first time Johnny Bench calls for a Tom Seaver fastball and Dave Lopes is guessing curve.

"You know," says Tommy John, "I'm from Terre Haute, Ind. I have lots of family there. They always come up to Cincinnati to see me pitch. That's a long drive, about 3½ hours. I know they like to see me pitch. I also have a sneaking suspicion they just enjoy seeing the Dodgers play the Reds, the best against the best." ■



What makes Thurman run?

Why "the guts of the Yankees," Thurman Munson, is often boorish, rude and outright offensive may stem from his having a father whom he could never please and from the catcher's desperate craving for national recognition

by DAN LAUCK

After days of rumors, Barbara Walters finally arrived at Fort Lauderdale Stadium in a long, black limousine. After the New York Yankees had finished their spring-training workout and a cluster of ABC-TV people had set up cameras and lights and reflectors, Ms. Walters sat down across from the man whom Gabe Paul, the Yankees' former president, had that morning called the *second* most valuable player on the team: Reggie Jackson. The most valuable player—the guts of the team, owner George Steinbrenner had called him—had long since showered, refused to answer media questions and had left the park. Thurman Munson may indeed be the guts of the 1978 Yankees, but he was not the subject of a Barbara Walters Special because he is not a good interview. Usually, Munson is not any kind of an interview; this was the tenth successive day in which he had refused to talk to the press. Which is a prime reason why Munson may never receive the national recognition he both deserves and desperately, poignantly, craves.

From his initial days as a Yankee in 1969, Munson has been a tough interview. At first, he was shy, a bit wary and in a slump. Later, he just chose to be tough. He became boorish, rude and, at times, outright offensive. Reporters rarely caught a glimpse of the inner man. One night in 1975, the year he finally became the American League's starting catcher in the All-Star game, he sat on his stool during a rain delay and talked about his father, a truck driver who had been gone a great deal during Thurman's childhood. It was a rare peek at Munson's early days, and when someone asked another question about his father, Munson suddenly sensed he was revealing too much. He muttered a nonanswer and the interview ended.

His roommate, shortstop Gene Michael, occasionally reminded Munson that the newspapermen whom he had ignored or told to get lost were the same ones who would someday decide whether Thurman Lee Munson would be inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame. Munson usually laughed and nodded and, the following day, often treated reporters in the same gruff way. "Sometimes it was almost as if he didn't want them to like him," Michael said.

Despite the pounding Munson's legs have taken, he still breaks up double plays at second and dives into runners at home.

It wasn't until the 1976 season that Munson finally seemed sure enough of himself to relax a bit with reporters. Though he still resented criticism of his only playing weakness, a strong but erratic throwing arm (you were far better off calling him a sonofabitch than hinting that he might have an erratic arm), he took his wife Diane's advice and opened up—to a point. One day late in the season, he was standing behind the batting cage in Oakland, chatting with a reporter, who jokingly accused Munson of being "a closet nice guy. I won't tell anybody, though," the writer said, "because it could ruin your image."

Munson whirled around and slammed his bat on the batting-cage pipe—against which the writer was leaning—and shock waves rippled through the reporter's body.

"Nice guy, huh?" Munson said. "Go to hell."

There was a hint of a smile under his mustache as Munson strode off. He was, in fact, pleased. Finally, the sharp corners of his personality seemed to be rounding off and his image was one that he could live with: a kind of Oscar the Grouch, who grumbled and blew off a lot of hot air at times, but who wasn't such a tough guy underneath.

And then he was slapped in the face. Not once or twice, but for a year and a half it seemed to Munson that every time he turned around, he was slapped. First by Cincinnati Reds manager Sparky Anderson. Then by George Steinbrenner. Then by Reggie Jackson. Then almost every day during the great turmoil of the 1977 season.

When Munson reported to the Yankees' 1978 training camp in Fort Lauderdale on February 24, he walked into the lockerroom and found two writers waiting to see him. He walked over, shook hands and exchanged greetings. But the moment one writer pursed his lips to ask a question, Munson said, "I'm not talking this year."

"This *year*?" a writer asked.

"This year," Munson replied. "You know how they said I was a sonofabitch the first seven years? Well, I'm going to be a sonofabitch again."

Thurman Munson, nice guy for a year, had run back into the closet. And locked the door.

Thurman Munson was the youngest of Darrell and Ruth Munson's four children. There were Darla, Janice, Dwayne and, finally, Thurman. At times, Darrell thought his wife babied Thurman, so when Darrell was home in the pleasant, two-story house on Frazier Avenue outside the wealthy section of Canton, Ohio, he made sure that he never babied Thurman. Especially when they played ball. If young Thurman missed a bad hop and the baseball smacked into his mouth and blood ran from his cut lip, his father would not allow the boy to cry.

Darrell Munson was a trucker who drove coast-to-coast much of the time when his children were growing up, but he somehow managed to be home when baseball season came. He pushed and prodded and Thurman learned well. Thurman was a natural athlete and a better player than his older brother, who had the physique that Thurman always wished he had. Dwayne was 6 feet 3 and 190 pounds; Thurman was nicknamed "Squatty Body." (Today he stands 5-11 and weighs 195.) On the field, they were nothing alike, either. "If Dwayne didn't like the way things were going," Thurman once said, "he'd just quit." Thurman never quit. He went to Kent State to play baseball and became the team's star.

Thurman's athletic success, however, seldom earned any praise from his father. Once, when Thurman was playing in the minors, his father showed up at a game and watched him hit two home runs and go five-for-five. "After the game, he told me, 'You really looked horseshit behind the plate tonight,' " Munson once told a reporter. When Munson hit .302 and earned American League Rookie of the Year honors in 1970, no one in the family called or sent a wire or note of any kind, except his sister Janice, who bought him a set of diamond cufflinks. The next year, his

mother suffered the first of two strokes that eventually confined her to a rest home in Canton. A few years later, his father left home and, to this day, Thurman does not know where his father is. Nor has Thurman spoken to his brother in years. He rarely hears from anyone in his family except Janice.

George Steinbrenner liked Thurman Munson immediately. It was the way he broke up double plays and threw himself into sliding spikes to save a run. He was a throwback to the Yankees who beat the Indians year after year when Steinbrenner was a kid in Cleveland. So when Steinbrenner took over the Yankees in 1973, intending to revive that era, he kept Munson. "You'll notice," Steinbrenner said, "most of the others are gone."

Steinbrenner became closer to Munson than to any other player. He asked Munson's advice about players and trades, and Munson trusted Steinbrenner at the negotiating table.

On the field, Munson—a controlled hitter with strong wrists and a compact swing—quietly battled Boston's Carlton Fisk for the right to be called the league's best all-round catcher. In 1973 Munson hit .301 to Fisk's .246, but fans voted Fisk the starting All-Star catcher. In 1975, when Munson was the starter, Fisk had missed the first half of the season with a broken arm. Munson finished 1975 with a .318 batting average and 102 runs batted in, but wondered if he would have started if Fisk had been healthy. In 1976 Munson started the All-Star game again, finished the season with a .302 average and 105 RBIs to Fisk's .255 and 58 RBIs, and earned the league's Most Valuable Player Award.

In the '76 World Series, the Reds swept the Yankees in four games, but Munson hit .529, including four-for-four in the last game. Minutes later, his gray sweatshirt darkened with perspiration, he stood in front of 200 sportswriters and listened to Cincinnati manager Sparky Anderson eulogize his own catcher, Johnny Bench. When asked to compare Bench and Munson, Anderson replied: "You don't ever compare anybody to Johnny Bench. You don't want to embarrass anybody."

"I went right after Sparky on that," Steinbrenner recalled this spring. "Several writers came to me right after the game, and I said Bench was a great player, but no way would I trade Thurman Munson for Johnny Bench even up. Not then, not now. Nobody is going to slight any of my players anymore."

Yet in Munson's mind, Steinbrenner himself slighted Thurman during the winter of '76 after signing Reggie Jackson. When Munson signed his contract the winter before, he thought Steinbrenner had promised him that no Yankee regular would be paid more than Munson. When Jackson signed, Steinbrenner assured Munson about the figures. Munson later learned from the Players Association that Jackson's figures were substantially higher; he said Steinbrenner had lied to him. "My promise to him," Steinbrenner said, "was that no regular would be paid more annually in his weekly checks than Thurman was." That definition leaves room for bonuses and deferred income that could make another player's contract worth three or



When moody Munson was named MVP in 1976, his wife Diane said, "Nothing could make him harder to live with."

four Rolls-Royces more than Munson's. As Jackson's was.

Steinbrenner and Munson settled that difference with more money, but their relationship was weakened. Munson, who long had felt unappreciated by those outside the Yankee organization, now felt unappreciated by his owner.

Early in spring training '77, Munson told a friend that some Yankee players already resented Jackson and that fans would ride him hard because of his $2.9 million contract. So Munson took the initiative and went to Jackson. They talked and opened a working relationship. Munson was the captain and felt that if he accepted Jackson, others would. "Thurman doesn't often bend over backward to be nice to someone," said a friend.

Hardly. Munson's welcome often will flush a face. His humor is sharp, caustic and personal. If there is a wart on your nose, he will point it out. Once last summer, when Yankee manager Billy Martin felt his job was in jeopardy, Munson walked over to Martin in a hotel lobby and asked, "You still managing here?"

There also has been an impression that Munson may be a redneck. His comments to Jackson in the lockerroom after the World Series victory last fall ("Hey, coon. Nice goin', coon") have been repeated in the press. One day this spring, he and backup catcher Cliff Johnson got into a long exchange of obscenities, which ended with Johnson, a much bigger man at 6 feet 4 and 227 pounds, picking up Munson in a bear-hug. "Put me down, you goddamn gorilla!" Munson demanded. When Johnson did, Munson stammered for an appropriate epithet. "You . . . you. . . . Hell, I'd call you a nigger, Cliff, but the press'd just print it again."

Such comments don't offend Johnson or, it seems, the other nonwhite Yankees who have known Munson a while. At times, he uses such language as almost an endearment, as he had after the dramatic playoff victory over Kansas City last fall. Pitcher Mike Torrez, with no rest, had come in to relieve and stopped the Royals. Munson and Torrez sat on a lockerroom trunk afterward, Munson's eyes watery. "Torrez," he said, "you're an outstanding goddamn Mexican."

Late in May 1977, SPORT published a story about Jackson joining the Yankees in spring training. While discussing his new teammates, Jackson said: "You know, this team . . . it all flows from me. I've got to keep it all going. I'm the straw that stirs the drink. It all comes back to me. Maybe I should say me and Munson . . . but really he doesn't enter into it. He's being so damned insecure about the whole thing. I've overheard him talking about me. . . . Munson thinks he can be the straw that stirs the drink, but he can only stir it bad."

Right after the magazine came out, a newspaperman brought a copy to the Yankee lockerroom and asked Munson if he had read it. Munson hadn't. He took the writer's magazine, read it quickly and kept it. When Munson left Yankee Stadium that day, the magazine—open to the story—was sticking out of his back pocket. It was on display. So were his feelings.

"Did you read that crap?" Munson asked substitute catcher Fran Healy.

"It probably was taken out of context," Healy said.

"For three pages?" Munson asked.

Munson and Jackson had never de-

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veloped into real friends, but at least had remained neighborly. The SPORT story ended that. Munson didn't care that Jackson said his statements had been made off the record. "He still said those things, didn't he?" Munson asked. Indeed, Jackson had, so they were no longer even neighborly. Jackson, a few days later, went to an empty corner of the dugout after hitting a home run, ignoring everyone's extended hand. Then, after Munson had homered, he spurned Jackson's extended hand at home plate.

Munson has often been moody at home, even during his most successful season. When he won the MVP, his wife was asked if the award would make Thurman harder to live with. "Nothing could make him harder to live with," Diane said. She was joking, but last season, with everything turning upside down, he was quiet when he came home, and when he did speak he was negative. Not even being with his two daughters and young son could always bring him out of his depression, and at times even the thought of going to the ballpark depressed him more.

When he arrived, he often went into the training room and lay down on a table. Sometimes he said nothing. Gene Monahan, the trainer, had been treating Munson's many aches and pains for years, and in 1977 Munson's mind was as damaged as his body. Monahan would not talk until Munson did. Monahan knew the training room was a refuge to which Munson ran for wordless solitude.

Most of Munson's time in the training room, though, was not spent lying around. He had a neck problem that caused him to twist and jerk it constantly, making him look like Exhibit A in a whiplash case. Midway through the season, he cut his hand and got a staph infection. He played one game after a doctor advised him not to. And, as the season wore on, the pain in his legs became more severe.

His thighs have paid a terrible toll over the years, from the constant squatting and from shattering collisions at the plate. The worst was when Cleveland's Charlie Spikes crashed into Munson a few years ago. "The next day he walked in," said Monahan, "and you couldn't see any bony part of his knee. It was all swollen and bloated with water and blood and fluid. Three games later, he played. Amazing."

All the pounding has herniated and deteriorated the muscle above his left knee, and the muscles in both legs give him so much pain that, according to Martin, Munson sometimes needs a strong painkiller to play. Some nights, his wife says, he has leg spasms that shake the entire bed.

Besides these ailments, late last season Munson suffered from severe headaches and blurred vision. He saw rings around the scoreboard lights and didn't see the ball as clearly as he used to.

Despite all his problems, Munson played 149 games, hit .308 and drove in 100 runs. When Martin tried to rest him in the second game of a doubleheader, Munson pleadingly asked, "Can't I just DH the second game?" Martin found it hard to say no when Munson was the team's best hitter. ("And he is the best hitter, no doubt," says Torrez.)

Munson began growing his beard during a road trip to the West Coast late last July. He didn't tell his wife about it on the phone all week, and to this day he has never told her *why* he grew it. There is an element of mystery about him at times, and he seems to enjoy that. His beard, however, caused no joy for Billy Martin. Steinbrenner had forbade beards, and Martin was expected to enforce the rule. Martin's position at the time was perilous, since the Yankees were slipping out of first place. The captain ignoring the owner's rule and growing a beard seemed unthinkable.

Catfish Hunter on Munson: "He didn't speak to me for a week. Not a word"

One night in Seattle, near the end of the trip, Munson and Healy walked into a restaurant and joined Bucky Dent, Lou Piniella and Catfish Hunter. They had just sat down when Hunter accused Munson of something. What, no one wants to say. Obviously, it was shocking. "He didn't speak to me for a week," Hunter said. "Not a word. He finally came up and said, 'You really meant that, didn't you?' And I said, 'Yeah, I did. And I was right, too, wasn't I?' He didn't say anything, just walked off. I was right, but he wouldn't say so."

If Hunter criticized Munson for growing a beard that could only cause more strife on the Yankees—and that's only a guess—Hunter's comments might have worked. The team flew east to Syracuse for an exhibition game. That evening, Munson showed up at the park an hour late, and only Martin and some writers remained in the lockerroom when Munson walked in—clean shaven. One writer asked Munson about his beard, and Munson muttered: "It's shaved. Let's just let it go at that, okay?"

Another writer asked a question.

"I'm not talking to writers," Munson said as he dressed.

That writer walked away, but another moseyed up and asked a question.

"Didn't you hear what I just said?" Munson demanded. "Don't even bother coming by my locker."

"Tonight?"

"For the rest of the year," Munson said.

Munson did not speak to any writers for the next 29 days.

The Long Silence ended in Cleveland on Labor Day, when Munson talked—for the first time publicly—about retiring from baseball. "This is no phase I'm going through," he told some writers. "It's based on reality. I'm tired of bus rides, plane rides, the travel. I'm tired of being away from my family. I'm tired of being called an ass." He said that after the season ended he would decide about retiring.

If Munson felt any exhilaration when the Yankees won the World Series, he kept it well hidden. He refused to attend New York City's ticker-tape parade for the Yankees, an event that he and Diane used to dream about participating in. And his Oscar the Grouch attitude—when teammates and fans were bubbling—stole the thrill from his wife. But she knew he was seriously thinking of quitting unless he could be traded to Cleveland, where he could be home with her and the children.

During the winter, Munson invited Steinbrenner to Canton and spent a day showing Steinbrenner all his real-estate holdings. ("Thurman is either a millionaire or very close to it, on paper," said Marty Appel, the Yankees' former public-relations director, who is writing a book with Munson.) Steinbrenner said, "He told me a couple of times, 'You see, I don't have to play baseball.' But I think he wanted me to see what he has there so that when he said he wanted to play in Ohio, I would understand why."

Steinbrenner understood after the trip, and Munson thought there was a good chance of the trade. What he didn't know was that Steinbrenner had also decided that Munson had to play baseball. "He has all these really great properties," Steinbrenner said, "but in a lot of situations he has large mortgages and, frankly, he needs the money to pay on them. If he gets them paid off, he's set for life." Knowing that, and knowing that he could never get equal value for Munson, Steinbrenner refused to trade him.

Munson knew then he was trapped—unless he retired. "He was closer to retiring than I like to think," Diane said. "I asked him not to quit. Begged him

not to quit." She knew he would not be happy, as did everyone else who has ever really known Thurman Munson.

"He loves to play the damn game," said Yankee relief pitcher Sparky Lyle. "He loves to hit. Loves to throw a guy out. He's a great competitor. He wants to be the best. That's why I didn't think he'd quit. Quitting when you're on top is a lot of shit."

Just two or three weeks before the Yankees were to report to Fort Lauderdale, Appel said, Munson decided he wasn't prepared to quit when he was still on top.

Gene Michael, now a Yankee coach, felt that Munson's refusal to talk to the press this spring was planned. There had to be a reason, Michael thought. And, it turned out, there was something going on: Munson was trying to get Steinbrenner to put on paper the verbal assurances about money that he had made earlier. Munson himself began with Steinbrenner, but waiting to represent Munson was Richard Moss, the former legal counsel for the Players Association, now an agent. No one had represented Munson before, and, after Steinbrenner's series of verbal assurances, Munson's financial position with the Yankees might require the services of three accountants to figure out precisely. Reportedly, Munson is making around $225,000 this season.

Had Munson talked to reporters, they would have asked if he was trying to get a new contract, if his retirement talk had been a bluff for more money, and many other things he would rather not be asked—such as how he really felt about Reggie Jackson.

The two Yankee stars resumed their "neighborly" ways—polite but restrained—during the early days of spring training, at least in public. Billy Martin called the Jackson-Munson relationship "beautiful." But the more accurate word was "cautious."

"I don't think they'll be going out to dinner a lot, let's put it that way," Mike Torrez said this spring. Torrez, traded to Boston, talked about Munson-Jackson more freely than anyone, but even he sounded careful. "I think the story in SPORT was blown up so much bigger than Reggie meant it. I think Reggie would love to get this thing with Thurman resolved. But it would be a damn hard thing to forget."

Few people expect Munson ever to forget it completely. He is too stubborn and has been slighted too often.

"They don't have to walk down the street arm-in-arm," Hunter said. "They just have to play together." And they can play together if they can manage to speak. That's why Munson was being careful this spring, watching his words and exchanging meaningless chatter around the batting cage with Jackson. And that's also one reason that on the day Steinbrenner arrived, the day after Barbara Walters, Munson had not yet spoken to any writers. Steinbrenner took the blame for Munson's silence and said Munson would talk.

So that afternoon, reporters waited outside the trailer that served as the Yankee offices while Munson and Steinbrenner met inside for more than an hour. When Munson emerged, the reporters didn't see him. He was 25 yards away before they poured out of the adjoining trailer. Two reporters walked quickly to catch up, two more straggled behind, the rest refused to chase Munson. Munson looked over his shoulder and kept striding. When he got to his car, he looked back and yelled at them: "I'll talk to you tomorrow."

Tomorrow came and went. And so did many tomorrows after that. Yet, through them all, Thurman Munson didn't say a word. ■



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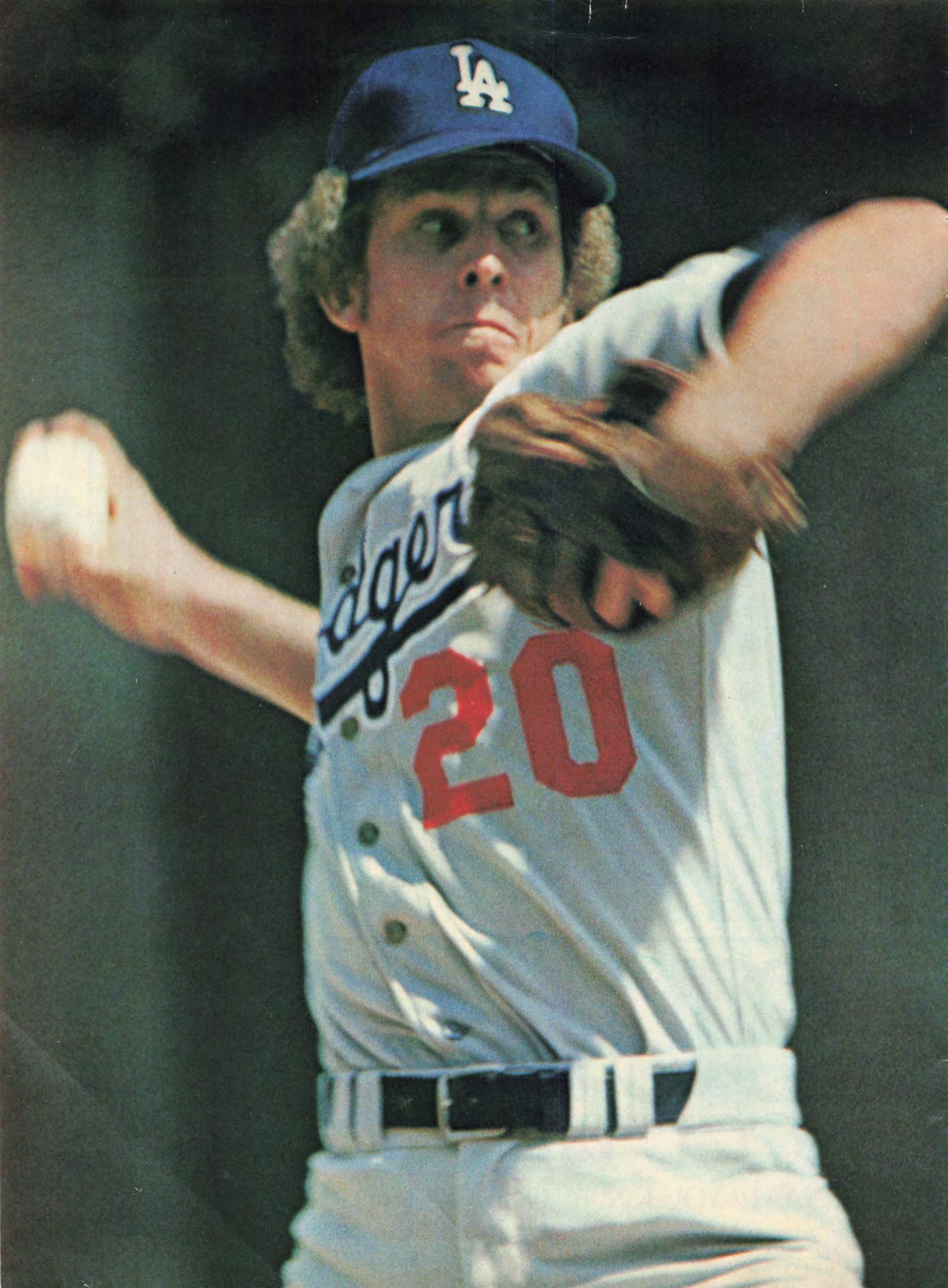
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Don Sutton does not bleed Dodger Blue

Impatient, cocky and a stubborn individualist, Sutton has often been in conflict with his team over the last 12 years. But over the last five years, he has been the winningest pitcher in the National League

by MARTY BELL

A cool breeze is blowing in from the Atlantic, and the temperature here at Vero Beach, Fla. is only in the mid-50s. Still, a capacity crowd of about 7,000 fans in Nat Holman Stadium at Dodgertown cheers as the Los Angeles Dodgers crush the Minnesota Twins, 12-1. But the Dodgers' winningest active pitcher—righthander Don Sutton (190 career victories)—hears only his own heavy breathing and the continual slap-slap of his running shoes against the hard macadam. He is off by himself, wrapped in a gray sweatsuit, running his daily ten miles past mobile homes and golf courses. His coaches have questioned Sutton's long-distance running, because most baseball players run only wind sprints, but Sutton has brushed the queries aside. He insists that distance running keeps his 33-year-old legs strong and his body thin and firm. Besides, he has heard Dodger officials question his training methods *and* his pitching theories often during his 12 years with the club. But Don Sutton has always done things his way.

Sutton's manic drive for success, even perfection, has kept him on a career-long odyssey—a lonely, limitless search for études that will keep him more finely tuned than his competition, provide him with *the edge*. The 6-foot-1, 185-pound native of Clio, Ala. has consulted nutritional experts on the proper diet, physical therapists on the proper conditioning, stretching experts on the proper exercise. He has altered his pitching style and extended his repertoire as his body has aged and changed. "I refuse to stagnate and become self-contented," he says.

"I don't appreciate the rah-rah style . . . all the hugging and kissing," says Sutton, who prefers pitching to cheering.

It was on one stop along this odyssey that I first encountered Don Sutton. Early in the 1974 season, he had fallen into a frustrating slump, gone 14 consecutive starts without a win. After he was knocked out of one June game in Pittsburgh, he retired to the whirlpool bath in the clubhouse where he picked up an abandoned copy of SPORT in which I had written a piece about hypnosis. The story mentioned that Maury Wills, a former teammate and friend of Sutton's, had undergone that treatment. Hypnosis seemed a bit contrary to the Fundamentalist beliefs that Sutton and his family cling to. But he was anxious to regain his edge. And as soon as he returned to Los Angeles, he contacted Wills, who set up an appointment with his hypnotist, Arthur Ellen.

Sutton approached the session with skepticism, but Ellen helped Sutton realize that he was letting unrelated thoughts and worries interfere with his pitching. With the assistance of a post-hypnotic suggestion, Sutton went on to win 19 of his next 21 starts—including two games in the playoffs and one in the World Series. During that Series against the Oakland A's, Wills introduced me to Sutton, who would describe his experiences with hypnosis for a bylined article in SPORT (February, 1975).

Sitting with him in a San Francisco hotel room that humid October day, I was struck by his urgent—even frantic—need to succeed, with his determination to do anything necessary to win. He revealed a capacity for self-inflicted pressure coupled with a desire for self-reliance that I have seen in only a handful of modern professional athletes, Pete Rose and Muhammad Ali coming quickly to mind.

Sutton describes himself as impatient, stubborn and cocky, and these traits have apparently served him well. "It's been my experience," says Red Adams, the Dodgers' pitching coach and Sutton's confidant for the past decade, "that a lot of the time our apparent weaknesses can also be our strengths. Impatience and stubbornness may have seemed like pitfalls early in Sutton's career. But they are also the reasons he got to the majors so early, improved himself, always found the edge and has always been successful. He learned to use his weaknesses to his advantage."

When Sutton's current contract ($1 million-plus for four years) expires in 1980, he will likely hold the Dodger records for most wins, shutouts, starts, innings pitched and strikeouts. He is beginning his 13th season with the Dodgers (four more than any other active teammate) and is scheduled to pitch his seventh consecutive Opening Day (which ties Don Drysdale's team record). The annual Opening Day assignment is a way in which this team, that enjoys celebrating itself, honors the pitcher who has won the most National League games during the last five years (88 to 87 each by Tom Seaver and Philadelphia's Steve Carlton).

Sutton's rivals confirm what the statistics show about his makeup. "He's the kind of guy," says Johnny Bench of the Cincinnati Reds, "who just forces himself to be good at whatever he does. It's you against him and he always wants to be better and can usually find a way. People like that aren't just good sometimes, they're good all the time."

"He never loses control of a game," says Sparky Anderson, the Reds' manager. "Succeeding is too important to him. He and Tom Seaver and Jim Palmer are the guys you want out there for any big game."

"He's a real challenger," says Pirate outfielder Dave Parker, the 1977 National League batting champion. "He doesn't fool around; he comes right at you. I usually like that 'cause it makes me more aggressive, but I haven't had too much success against him. He's lean and mean."

But at the same time that Sutton's personality has caused him to produce consistently, it has also often made his relationship with the Dodgers precarious.

Don Sutton

It is St. Patrick's Day and Walter O'Malley, the feisty old Irish patriarch who runs the Dodgers, has gathered some of his current and former players at the Dodger Pines Country Club to celebrate the holiday with a golf tournament. The atmosphere is that of an exclusive fraternity reunion. The color that sets the mood is not the green of O'Malley's heritage but, not surprisingly, Dodger Blue.

Inside the sandstone clubhouse, waitresses wear royal-blue jerseys decorated with names and numbers of the most famous Dodgers. These same names appear on room doors and street signs at the Dodgertown training complex. Everywhere you walk at this remote, resortlike site, you are confronted, even assaulted, by reminders of the Dodgers' proud past.

Surrounded by tradition, Don Sutton stands on the driving range, holding a three-iron. From a distance he still looks young, but his blond hair has some gray curls at the temples, and his tight-skinned, angular face shows the strain of keeping in shape. On the basis of his records, Sutton's name will be the next one to appear on the doors, street signs and waitresses' jerseys here.

He lofts golf balls up into the yellow morning light with an awkward, self-taught but effective swing, then pauses when Rick Monday, the Dodgers' imposing centerfielder, walks by.

"Hey, it's Rick Monday," Sutton announces with a puckish gleam in his eyes. "He plays baseball, golf, poker, hunts hogs. He's ag-*ile*, mo-*bile*, versa-*tile* . . . se-*nile* and ster-*ile*."

Monday looks askance at Sutton, who returns a cute smile.

"Hey, nice pants," Monday says, noticing that he and Sutton are adorned in the same kitchen-wallpaper, green paisley print. Sutton steps beside Monday and they pose with arms around each other.

"You two look alike," someone says.

"Hope not," Sutton says. "If we were all the same, some of us would be unnecessary."

He winks at me and walks to the first tee. His remark was intended as fleeting, but it hangs in the warm air under the Dodger-Blue sky.

Part of the Dodger tradition, the part that Sutton finds most difficult to succumb to, is the demand for a certain conformity. To be approved by and content with Walter O'Malley requires striking a Faustian bargain. O'Malley's Boys live in luxury; they play at the loveliest of modern ballparks, travel on the team's private jet, are protected by the cooperative local media and spend the end of winter at this unique complex that includes two golf courses, lighted tennis courts, nightly feature films, better food than can be found anywhere in the area and makes the other camps dotting this thumb-shaped state seem like slums. In exchange for these comforts, O'Malley's Boys are expected to swear by the Organization, smile and keep discontent locked away inside. With the Dodgers, PR is as important an abbreviation as RBI and ERA.

But Sutton is a stubborn individualist who does not always do things the prescribed Dodger way. "I do not bleed Dodger Blue," he says. "I don't appreciate the rah-rah style. I don't go in for all the hugging and kissing."

He pauses, then adds, "I'm also not a yelling, screaming headline-grabber."

"Like some Yankee players?" I say.

"You said it, I didn't," he says. "But because I handle things in my quiet, private way, my feelings have never gotten a lot of publicity and that's the way I like it to be."

Sutton has spent his entire adult life with this team, joining it in 1965, at age 20, after less than one full season in the minors. "He came up to the big club so early," Red Adams says, "because he had unusually fine stuff for a youngster." Adams is referring to a hard, wide-breaking curveball that was the best in the major leagues before Bert Blyleven came along. Ironically, the same pitch that expedited Sutton's promotion to the Dodgers caused his first conflicts.

"On the first day I was with the team," Sutton says, "someone very, very high up in the front office asked to see how I grip my curve. I showed him and he said, 'Now let me show you how we hold it up here.' A few months later, I was pitching well and this gentleman says to me, 'Now aren't you glad I straightened you out?' Then I showed him I was still throwing my way."

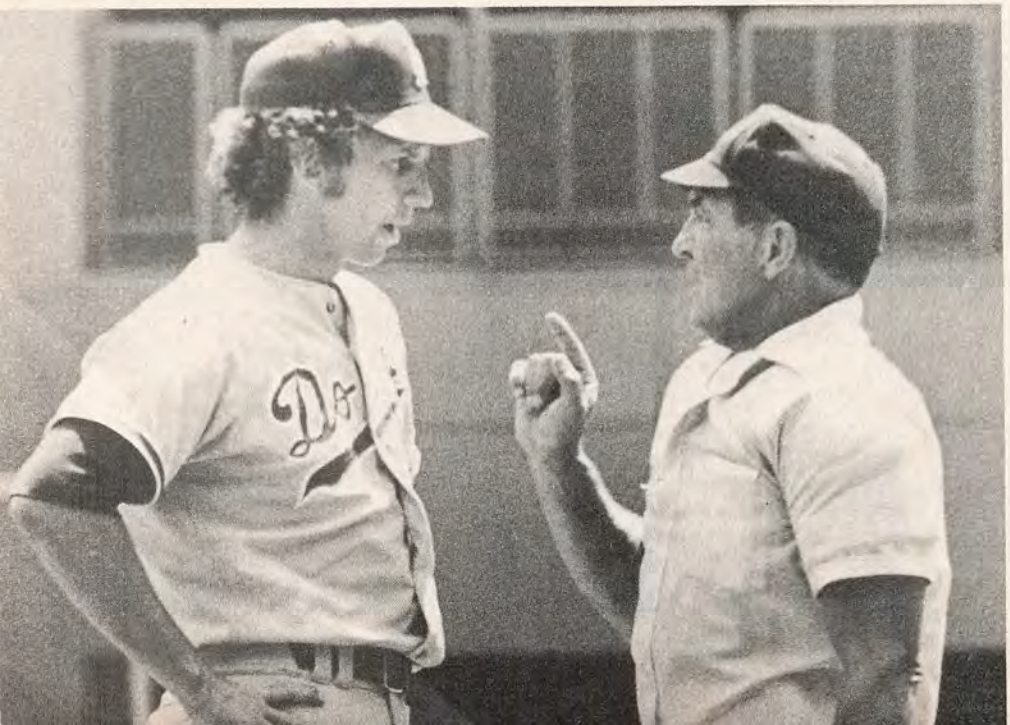
Walter Alston, the former Dodger manager whom Sutton calls "the most honest man I've ever met," didn't object to how Sutton threw his curve but to *when* he threw it. Alston chastised the youngster in private for relying on the breaking ball instead of the traditional fastball in critical situations. "People have been playing this game for 100 years," Alston said, "and you want to change it in less than one."

"I know my stubbornness caused some problems between Walt and me," Sutton says, "but in my own mind I wasn't just a rookie. In my approach to this game, I've been a major-leaguer since I was 12 years old."

At that age, Sutton was taught to pitch by his sixth-grade teacher in Pensacola, Fla., a man named Henry Roper, who had played in the Giant organization. "He taught me my style," Sutton says. "Good control, change speeds and throw the curve when you're behind. By the time I got to the majors, in my mind, my theories were tried and tested.

"The criticism I got up here didn't create obstacles but gave me incentives to prove I knew what I was doing. I have no trouble admitting I'm wrong, it just takes me longer than everyone else. I know this personality can be troublesome, but that's me."

As Sutton says this, Johnny Rose-



Umpires have warned Sutton and even frisked him on the mound after opponents complained about illegal pitches.



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Bonnie and Clyde led us on a wild chase to the site of their last known hideout.

Nearby we hid a case of Canadian Club.

It had been 44 years since Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow sped through this northern Louisiana wilderness on their last run from the law. Tracking their legend even now is a wild and wooly chase over lonesome red clay roads which run deep in tangled pine forests.

We met folks who'd seen them.
Finally our search led to where an old squatter's cabin had once stood. Bonnie and Clyde were known to have holed up here in their last days, and local folks told us they'd seen the two lurking hereabout back in '34. So having found the long-lost hideout, we trekked into the brush and buried a case of Canadian Club.


Bonnie and Clyde.

Start at "the end of the trail."
To find that C.C., start your trail exactly where Bonnie and Clyde's ended. Find the road they took to their fateful rendezvous with the law – and head in the opposite direction, all the way to the next parish. Go past the "three R's" place, and where David's lad abides, turn onto a red dirt road. At the black gold storage place, head north.



Look for a warning.
Two hard left turns and a short drive will bring you to an old sawmill. Continue till you are warned about digging and stop (if you're warned more than once, you've gone too far). On your right is an overgrown trail. Follow it to two former money-makers. From one of them, take a bearing of 160 degrees, and take a pace for each of the 120 years people have been enjoying Canadian Club. Now take 44 more in any direction but the one you've come from to where three stumps form a triangle.

We hope you brought ice and glasses, for within that triangle, just one foot down, lie 12 bottles of the world's finest tasting whisky. But if the rigors of the hunt seem too great, you can find the same great taste at your favorite tavern or package store by simply saying, "C.C., please."



Canadian Club

"The Best In The House"* in 87 lands.

boro, the former Dodger catcher, walks by. "Hey, Gabby," Sutton shouts to him. "Would you say I was cocky when I first came up?"

"Not cocky. Confident," Roseboro says.

"What's the difference?" Sutton asks.

"Now you're cocky," Roseboro says.

Sutton was frustrated through his first five seasons, depending on his curve and winning 66 games while losing 73. "When Don was younger," Adams says, "he had slumps like everyone else, but his were magnified because he was learning up here instead of in the minors. Before he got good, he had to learn to cope with his own bad performances, to forget his last game and just get ready for the next one. Pitchers have to be patient. They're like real-estate salesmen, while hitters are like Fuller Brush men.

"A Fuller Brush man can make four calls in a day, get two doors slammed in his face, make two sales and feel successful. But a real-estate salesman works for days on one deal, one little thing goes wrong and he blows the whole thing. Then he has to get himself up for the next deal. It's never easy after defeat and it's worse after two or three."

In 1971, at the age of 26, Sutton matured and finished with a 17-12 record. The next year he was 19-9 with a 2.08 ERA. He then began the stretch that made him the league's winningest pitcher over the last five seasons and established himself as a worthy successor to Dodger greats Drysdale and Hall of Famer Sandy Koufax.

Sutton now admits that he improved only when he accepted things that Alston had told him for four or five years. "I eventually learned that I was too dependent on the curve," he says. "I guess my stubbornness slowed down my development. But I also used to feel responsible for everything that happened around me—for making it impossible for the hitters to hit, for the plays in the field, for scoring runs. I worried about things I had no control over, but I wanted everything to go right.

"As I grew up, I learned that all I could do was make it difficult for the hitters to hit and the rest would take care of itself. And I learned that my strengths were not throwing the ball by people, but change of speeds and control. I added a changeup to my repertoire, which Andy Messersmith helped me with a great deal. I stopped worrying about beating folks with my curve. Variety gave me the edge. So now I throw about 50 percent fastballs, 20 percent curves, 20 percent sliders and 10 percent changeups." He winks and says, "Add a few phantom pitches in there.

"I rely on whatever's working that day, which I can tell in the first inning. And if nothing's working . . ." Sutton drops his golf club and goes into a soft shoe in his golf spikes . . . "it's song-and-dance time."

But while his differences with the team over his pitching style have subsided with time and success, other differences have surfaced.

Sutton pars the first two holes, then birdies the third, a 670-yard par six that O'Malley built to make his course unique. Along the way, Sutton tells me, "Mr. O'Malley built this course without any obstacles. Then he watched his friends play it and put the trees and traps where they hit most often.

"The first time I played with him, he hit into a sand trap, then went to put a tee under the ball. I told him: 'You can't do that.' "

"And he said, 'Who the hell built the golf course?' "

Tom Lasorda: "Don Sutton wasn't in my corner when I got this job"

"And what did you say?" I ask.

Sutton snaps to attention and says, "Sorry, sir."

On the fourth hole, Sutton bounces his tee shot off a bridge over a creek and is left with 125 yards to the green. Walter O'Malley is looking on, sitting in a golf cart with a nurse from the Mayo Clinic, where he is under treatment. Sutton approaches the ailing man and gently asks, "How are you feeling, sir?"

"Fine, now that I don't have to deal with you and your agent," O'Malley barks.

Sutton walks to his ball, shaking his head and smiling. He pulls out a short iron and misguides a high shot that just catches the fringe off the green.

O'Malley shouts, "Ball one!"

Sutton drops his club. "Ah, come on," he says, "it caught the corner." He and O'Malley laugh, then Sutton proceeds to the green. "Man's never too sick to agitate," he says.

The anecdotes and exchange are doused with respect and cautiousness, amusement and frustration, feelings that have flowed throughout Sutton's tenure with the team.

His discomfort is a matter of style and temperament. When Walter Alston retired two years ago, Sutton made it known that he thought ex-teammate Jeff Torborg should get the manager's job. But Tommy Lasorda was promoted and carried on in an effervescent style that has his players repetitively shouting their love for each other. This is not Sutton's style. He would fit in better if devotion and unity were not talked about as often as the Bee Gees are heard on the radio. He says, "The pitcher has the luxury of doing things for himself and having the whole team benefit," which is most un-Dodgerlike.

Though Sutton is the Dodger of longest service and most spectacular achievement, this team belongs to Lasorda and Steve Garvey and Reggie Smith. They get the press, the endorsements, the most visible and profitable appearances. Dodger contracts are well publicized and even with Sutton's long-term contribution, Garvey and Smith, among others, get paid better, which must gnaw at Sutton's ego.

On three separate occasions over the last few seasons, Sutton has asked to be traded, which is, perhaps, the most offensive request a Dodger can make. He had the chance to play out his option, but signed a new contract last season, "mostly due to my impatience," he says. There was talk of a deal for Tom Seaver, but it never came off. And the Dodgers do not readily trade away an essential player, whatever his personality, without getting an essential player in return.

Lasorda is a geyser of praise for certain Dodgers, those he coached in the minors (the entire starting infield) or those who need stroking (outfielders Dusty Baker and Reggie Smith). When I arrive at Dodgertown, Lasorda is standing in the training room with Smith. Without coaxing, Lasorda orates on Smith's talents for half an hour.

But when I ask about Sutton, Lasorda is less effervescent. He begins by saying, "Don Sutton is probably one of the finest-conditioned pitchers I've ever seen. He's one guy who realizes the older you get, the more you have to work. I like to call him my three-C pitcher—control, condition and courage." But then Lasorda points out, "Don Sutton wasn't in my corner when I got this job. He's admitted that." And he asks, "How can anyone want to be traded away from the best organization in baseball? We've got our own plane. And look at this complex. Did you ever see anything like it? How can you want to leave a ballpark that's perfect for a pitcher? Huh? Tell me that. Tell me why anyone would want to be traded away from here. I don't understand it."

When asked about Lasorda, Sutton says only, "We understand each other

very well and work together for the good of the ballclub."

Lasorda seems to express the combination of professional respect and personal skepticism toward Sutton that runs throughout the organization. But even though Sutton has committed himself to this team for what will probably be the remainder of his major-league career, he still expresses some discomfort.

After shooting a round of 74, the best of the ballplayers, Sutton sits in the oak-paneled clubhouse dining room, amidst Dodger memorabilia and jerseyed waitresses, drinking Blue Nun and talking with the others in his foursome.

"Do you guys know about all the records this fella has set?" asks Jim Coffey of Erman Oil, which co-sponsored this tournament. "Why he's set. . . . He's set. . . . Tell them, Don. Tell them about the one-hitters."

"I've thrown five one-hitters and seven two-hitters," Sutton says.

"Does it upset you that you've never thrown a no-hitter?" someone asks.

"Nah," Sutton says with a smile. "I get more publicity for just missing so often."

"How long have you been playing now, Don?" Coffey asks.

"This will be my 13th year," Sutton says.

"Gee, doesn't seem that long," someone says.

This seems to upset Sutton, who says, "Everyone knows how great Seaver and Palmer are, but no one knows what I've done."

The remark surprises me. "You don't really feel unappreciated, do you?" I ask.

"Sure do," he says.

"Come on," I say. "Everyone mentions Seaver, Sutton and Palmer in the same breath. Sparky Anderson did it just yesterday."

"Well, if they do," Sutton says, "I don't hear it."

Later, when we are alone, I bring this up again.

"I don't need to be the most famous player in baseball," he says. "But it would be nice to know that I was respected and appreciated by those around me. Our publicity department didn't even know I've won the most games in the league the last five years until I told them."

With the Dodgers, it seems, Sutton does not have the edge and his makeup is such that he will never be content without it. "Whether you like it or not," he says, "when you get to the majors, you're not only competing against the other teams, but also against others on your own team. You compete for a spot on the roster, for contracts, for attention, whether you like it or not.

"Someday I'm going to retire with most of the Dodger pitching records and someone's going to pick up the record book and say, 'Gee, I never realized this Sutton was such a great pitcher.' "

The next afternoon, while the others take fielding practice on an adjacent diamond, the Dodger pitchers use the batting cages. Rick Rhoden and Terry Forster and Tommy John take pleasure in battling the pitching machine, but Sutton seems perfectly content sitting on a chair behind the cage. He has on occasion joked that he would like to be traded to the other league where pitchers are not required to hit.

"It seems against your nature to not enjoy hitting," I say. "You're a good all-round athlete and you love competition."

"I fell and got hurt the first time I roller-skated," he says, "and I never tried it again. I don't attempt things I can't do well."

Sutton's pride has kept him searching

"It would be nice to know," Sutton says, "I was appreciated by those around me"

for the edge whatever his feelings about his situation may be. According to voices around the league, his latest discovery is an illegal pitch that travels with the unpredictability of a spitball.

"I suspect him of roughing up the ball with some kind of sandpaper or pine," Sparky Anderson says. "I suspect. I can't accuse. But every ball we check has a cut in it. Still, nobody's ever found anything on him."

During one game against the Cubs last June, home-plate umpire Bruce Froemming came out to the mound and frisked Sutton. "He looked everywhere but in my jock," Sutton says. Finding nothing, Froemming went back behind the plate. Sutton threw one pitch to the hitter, ex-Dodger Bill Buckner, then third-base umpire Dick Stello called for the ball. Instead of tossing it to him, Sutton fired it.

"He pointed to the ground with his finger," Sutton says, "so I thought he was calling for a fastball."

The pitcher was ejected from the game.

This past off-season, Sutton was co-chairman of the Tim Conway Golf Tournament for Spastic Children in Los Angeles. The day before the event, a celebrity pulled out. So Sutton, who lives in Calabassas with his wife Patti and their two children, invited Sparky Anderson, who resides nearby in Thousand Oaks.

"I hate to do this to you at the last minute, Sparky," Sutton said. "But if you'll play, I'll do anything for you, even tell you where I hide it."

Sparky played in the event, then asked Sutton to live up to his part of the bargain.

"I don't do it, Sparky," Sutton told him. "Steve Yeager [the Dodger catcher] does."

Although he emphatically denies cutting the ball, Sutton enjoys this phantom pitch controversy. Even if he doesn't throw it, it gives him an edge with the hitters who are looking for an additional pitch from him. "Besides," he says, "this may get me an endorsement from Black and Decker."

The humor that surrounds the controversy brings up the little-boy side of Sutton, the puckish quality that makes him pleasant to be around despite his obvious intensity. He has poured water in his coaches' pockets, sat on the bench with no shirt on, crawled the length of the bench to goose a teammate with a bat and, last season, glued the bullpen phone so that the dugout could not call in a relief pitcher.

"I prepare for a game like an attorney preparing for a case," he says. "That's the business part. But it's a little kid's game too. I like the con, the agitation, all the kids' things that come with it. But I like to pick my spots to agitate, which might not be fair to others. What can I say? I'm just a walking paradox."

Sutton is now preparing for a future in television with all the businesslike intensity with which he approaches pitching. He has worked off-seasons as a disc jockey in L.A. and spent last summer as an apprentice at KNBC-TV doing everything from buying coffee to on-air sportscasting. His career is being guided by E. Gregory Hookstratton, the attorney who guided Don Meredith, Merlin Olsen and Phyllis George into network television jobs.

"I respect him for what he's doing," says Johnny Bench, who at 30 is contemplating retirement. "He's now studying television from the bottom up, learning everything. Don's always been thoroughly prepared. I even envy him a little bit. He knows what he wants to do and goes out and does it."

"It might seem as if I'm being patient this time around," Sutton says about his television groundwork. "But I'm really not. I'm doing apprentice work now so that when I do retire, I'll be ready to step right into a network job."

"You're trying to get the edge again," I say to him.

He smiles and says, "Always." ■

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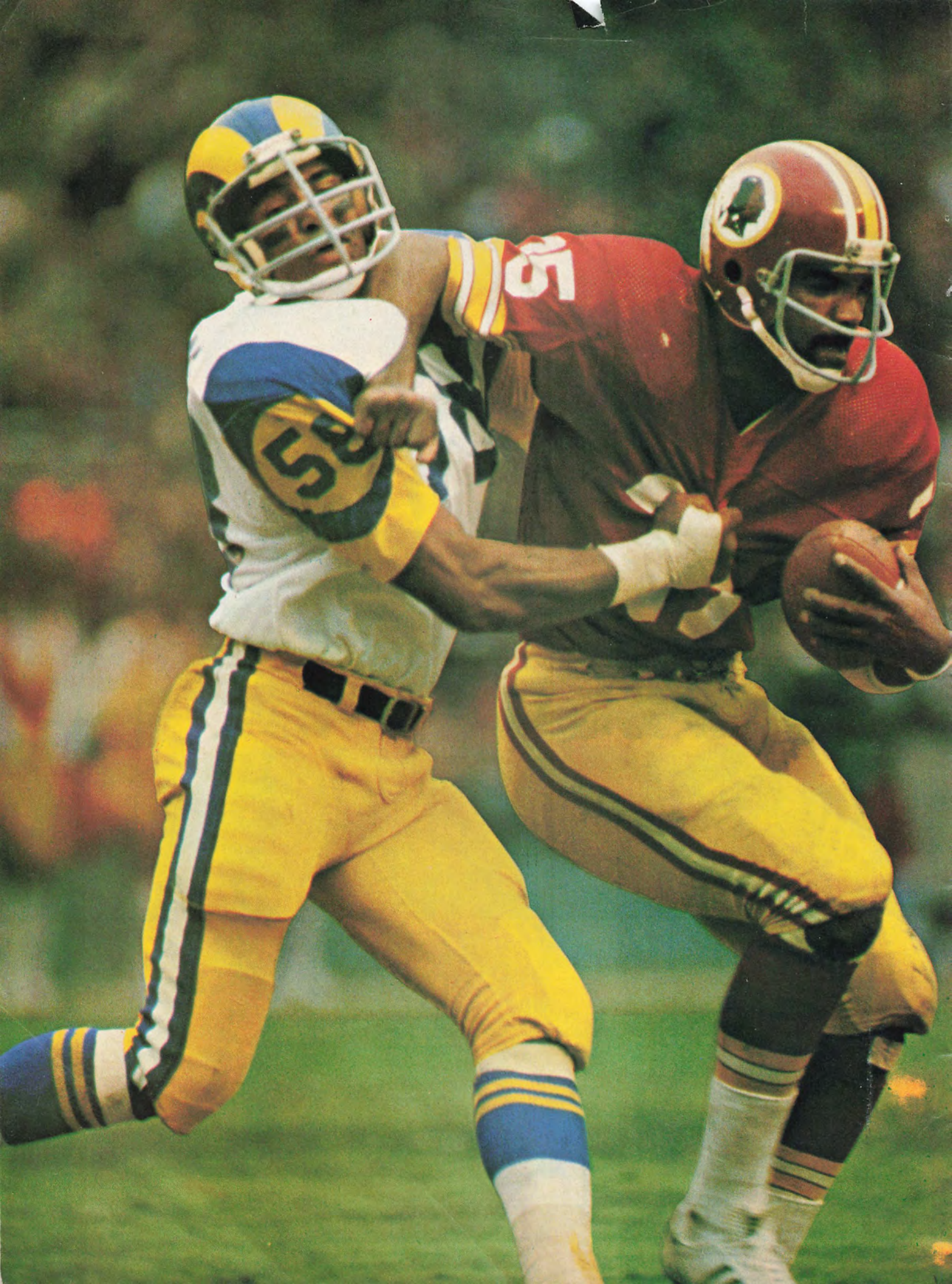
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"Oh, man, we blew it again"

Said the Rams' veteran All-Pro linebacker after, one more time, his team failed in the NFL playoffs. "I'm not putting the blame completely on [quarterback] Pat Haden," Robertson says in his diary of last season, "but I think that if Joe Namath had been healthy, Joe could've done it"

by ISIAH ROBERTSON
with Lynda Huey

August 9, 1977

At the Los Angeles Rams' training camp in Fullerton, Calif., Isiah Robertson—the 6-foot-three, 225-pound All-Pro strongside linebacker—charged out of the lockerroom after practice. Isiah had agreed to meet with SPORT periodically over the next six months to tape-record his observations about himself and his team, to accumulate through those conversations an inside diary of the Rams' 1977 season. This was to be the first taping session. Shouting instructions to meet him in the pressroom at the other end of the camp, he climbed into a car with a pair of Orange County businessmen wearing pastel polyester suits. Then he promptly forgot the taping and went straight to lunch. Immersion in the hectic life of Isiah (Butch) Robertson had begun.

A half hour later, Isiah returned and began his oral diary:

Seven years ago [defensive end] Jack Youngblood and I were among the youngest Rams. Now we're two of the oldest. Leadership is expected from *us* now. It's my turn to be the energizing force—the one who gets everybody else up to go out and work. No more dragassing or complaining about camp.

Though he played "bored" last season, Isiah—here clinging to Redskin Calvin Hill—was voted Linebacker of the Year.

Like last week, Wendell Tyler, one of our rookie running backs, was trying to get out of practice because he had a cold. Now I can understand not wanting to play when you don't feel well—but not when all you've got is a cold. Not when you're a pro. I showed him my toes. They'd been cut up and were bloody, but I was going out to practice anyway. Wendell looked at them and just put on his helmet.

I worked hard to get myself ready for this training camp. In the off-season I visited my hometown in Louisiana, and while I was there I began running 3½ miles in the morning and 3½ miles at night. Because of all that work, the transition to training camp wasn't as difficult this year as in the past.

In fact, this year's training camp has been very enjoyable. I attribute a lot of that to Joe Namath. I met him out here before camp officially started for the veterans. Joe had reported early to get in some work, and I was in the area on some business for my shirt company. (Three years ago, I started the Professional T-Shirt People; we represent professional athletes and make sportswear with their names, numbers and pictures on it.) When I stopped by the camp, I introduced myself to Joe. He seemed like a pretty quiet dude, but then when camp began, we found that we have similar lifestyles—he's a comfirmed bachelor and so am I. We both like creative, attractive, career-oriented young ladies. So every night off, we've been out together—dinner, movies, general carousing. The other night we were out partying and people followed us from club to club. We'd go in one place, then say, for example, "Hey, let's go have dinner at Bobby McGee's." And before we'd even get out the door, there would be people running to their cars as if somebody had said there's a bank that just got robbed and money's blowing all over the street. About 40 cars followed us home that morning.

Of course, Joe and I have both learned to draw the line on the partying and know when to get serious. We've been around. I remember what a veteran teammate, [defensive end] Deacon Jones, told me when I was a rookie. "Butch," he said, "you gotta get your *game* together before you get your *play* together. Get your game together *first*. Then you can play at whatever you want on the side."

I came to the Rams right from Southern University in Louisiana, and Deacon Jones really had a great influence upon my career. I like tucked myself under Deacon's armpit. Every time Deacon made a move, I was right there—so nobody could mess with me or cuss me out. When Deacon went to the restroom, I was there with him.

In my seven years, the Rams have never made it to the Super Bowl. If Joe does well, there will be a lot of fan excitement in this town. Joe feels the pressure. He knows we're depending on him to take us to the Super Bowl. And I, for one, believe he can do it.

August 25, 1977

The Rams came into this last week at their training camp with a 1-2 record in exhibition play and had not yet meshed as a team. In the third game, against the San Francisco 49ers, Isiah had been hurt. But he was out on the practice field anyway, working out. Afterward, he emerged from the lockerroom and began taping:

The next to last play of the 49er game, I pulled my groin muscle when my cleats caught in the Astro Turf. I missed three days of practice because of it, but today I came back, moving cautiously. I'm going to try to *not* play in this week's game against Kansas City—I'm only about 80 percent—but that depends on Tom Catlin, our linebacker coach.

Until this groin pull, I was feeling 100 percent. In the three exhibition games, I've played six quarters. Those six quarters have been the best football of my career. I'm reading sharply. The Transcendental Meditation class I'm taking allows no distractions. I'm concentrating better than ever.

My goal this year is to play on a defensive team that is, bar none, the best in the NFL. I see the potential there, and I think we can accomplish that. It's too early, though, to say what our offense can do. Joe's health is a question mark. The team is wondering: "Can Joe do it?" Even though he couldn't get it going Sunday against San Francisco, I feel Joe can do it. I'm not saying that Pat Haden couldn't do it. We have such a solid football team that we're going to beat people with *any* quarterback.

What I have to do, personally, is not forget how much leadership they're expecting from me. Last night, for instance, I pulled probably one of the dumbest stunts of my career. Joe and I were out in this bar and it was getting close to the 11 p.m. curfew. Joe said, "You know, I ain't done nothing wrong all training camp, and in my whole career I ain't never abided by the rules 100 percent. I'm not going in tonight. Come on. I'll pay your fine." Well, out of about 500 people in the place, only 498

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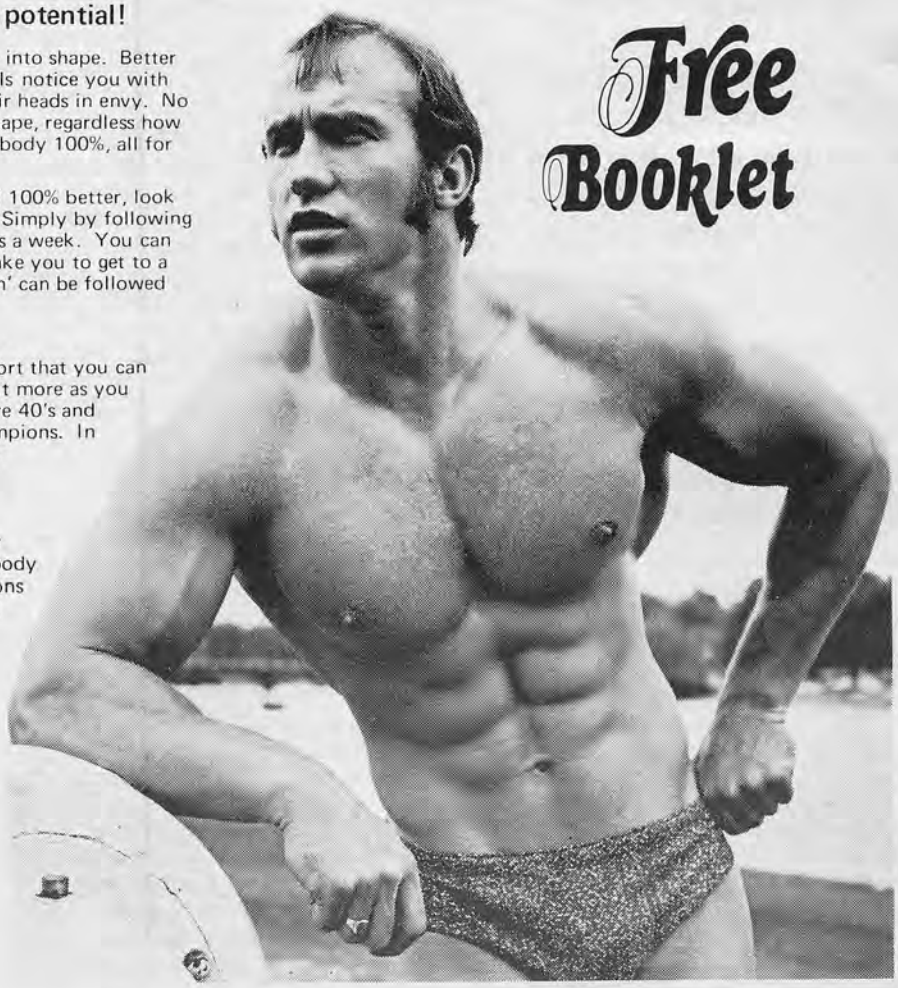
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Jim Chandler
BEFORE

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Rams diary

were standing around Joe and me, so it was like an ego thing now. So I said, "Shit, I'm All-Pro. I'm bad, too. I'll stay out with ya, Joe."

When we got in, we had to go see head coach Chuck Knox to check in for the night. I told him we had a flat tire. He looked at us, knowing we were lying. Joe saw the expression on his face and said, "No, we didn't have a flat tire; we had a drink." So now my credibility with the coach, a man whom I totally respect, was almost down the drain because of me trying to be a big boy like Joe Namath. I've got to be a leader, not a follower. I've got to do what's best for Isiah—and the team.

September 15, 1977

Isiah answered the door at his two-story, four-bedroom house in Fountain Valley, grabbed a handful of letters from his overflowing mailbox and returned to the living room where two lights were blinking on his push-button phone. He finished one conversation, then punched to the other. Immediately, the free line lit up again. After a half hour of juggling calls, he had made three dinner engagements and had promised two other people he would do his best to get them tickets to the home opener.

Isiah's identification with the Rams was reflected in his home's decor. The front doormat was shaped as a football with his number, 58, on it. The ball was yellow, the number was blue—the Rams' colors. The den furniture was yellow. The downstairs bathroom had blue guest soap and yellow towels.

The Rams ended the exhibition season with a 1-5 record. The final game had been a 21-0 loss to Oakland, and in the third quarter the fans in the Los Angeles Coliseum began booing Namath and shouting for Haden. In the fourth quarter the coaching staff obliged them, only to see Haden become as bogged down as Namath.

In a postgame radio interview, Isiah had said the whole team was in a slump. But then he reminded everyone that, with the regular season about to open, the Rams were starting fresh again, at 0-0. And now, in his home, he began to elaborate:

We lost a lot of exhibition games, but maybe that wasn't all bad. Complacency might have set in if we hadn't.

For myself, that groin pull has continued to be bothersome. I felt Tom Catlin was very unfair in playing me against Kansas City a couple of weeks ago. He knew I was hurt. But, hell, I realized a while back that I contract my body out. We players are employees, and some of what comes down from the owners and management is maddening.

Last week, for example, I walked into the linebacker meeting and Mel Rogers wasn't there. That's how I found out he'd been cut. During the players' strike a couple of years ago, he was on the picket line, so he was labeled a troublemaker. I thought Mel was our second-best outside linebacker.

Normally, I have a lot of input in the linebacker meetings, but I was so upset during this one that I just walked out. Then later, in practice, coach Catlin started in on me:

"Why can't you get that Cover 7 drop? On that Cover 7 drop you have to look at the back."

"I know that," I said.

"Then why aren't you looking?"

"Well, if you hadn't played me against Kansas City, goddamnit, you mighta found out. My leg's bothering me."

"Well, you gotta see that back," Catlin said.

"Well, I just can't see the back now."

"We're gonna have to throw out six defenses then," he said.

When Namath broke curfew, Isiah said, "I'm bad, too. I'll stay out with ya"

"I don't give a shit how many you gotta throw out," I said. "If you got somebody else who can see the back, put him in here."

I was on a bummer for four or five days. I had become very close to Mel Rogers.

Now, though, I'm all right. I have to be. Today, at practice, Jack Youngblood wrote on the blackboard: "I AM READY TO PLAY." Then I wrote my name under those words. It lets the other guys know that I don't lack confidence. Why not try to fire them up? Later, Don Hewitt, our equipment manager, added two words to the ones Youngblood had written: "WITH MYSELF."

November 15, 1977

The Rams' slump continued into the season. Favored to win its division easily, Los Angeles was upset by Atlanta in the opener. The Rams then beat Philadelphia and San Francisco, but lost to the Chicago Bears in a Monday night game that spotlighted Isiah's skills and passion. Intercepting two passes, he raced them upfield so dramatically that sportscaster Frank Gifford said, "He's got the speed and range of a halfback, and also the niftiness." The TV cameras also showed Isiah several times standing over people he'd tackled and beating his chest like King Kong. Moreover, when Bear halfback Walter Payton hit Ram safety Bill Simpson in the knees long after a play had been whistled dead, and Bear linebacker Waymond Bryant smashed Namath in the larynx, it was Isiah who publicly threatened retribution on behalf of his teammates.

In the Bear game, Haden replaced Namath for good as the Ram quarterback. Los Angeles then won two straight, but was upset by New Orleans, and again Isiah was in the limelight, accused in the press of blasting his teammates for not putting out. He also added Saints tight end Henry Childs to the list of "cheap-shot artists" he was going to pay back because Childs had lashed Robertson's face with an elbow during the game.

Through most of those weeks, the Rams were tied with Atlanta in the Western Division race. But after beating Green Bay on Sunday, November 13, they were in first place alone with a 6-3 record, a game ahead of the Falcons. That Monday, following the Green Bay game, Isiah came out of the lockerroom looking more imposing than usual, with his mustache blending into a three-day growth of beard. He promised to attend a diary-taping session the next day. Naturally, that promise led to some missed connections. Finally, there was a meeting in the lounge of the Beverly Hilton Hotel. He arrived with his face clean shaven; even the mustache was gone. He addressed the tape-recorder:

It was a disappointing first half of the season. You lose to Atlanta and New Orleans, and that always causes problems. People start pointing fingers. You'd hear the defense bitching in the back of the plane about that dull-ass offense. Plus the team was concerned about Joe Namath, wondering whether he was going to come through with the big one for us.

After the New Orleans game, a reporter asked me, "What's the problem?" I said that we have to play better individually. The headline said, "Isiah Raps Teammates." At practice that day, it was quiet for a couple of hours because guys were a little pissed off. But the guys pretty much know me. The next day, I came into practice smiling and just said, "Hey, check your hearts out, you know what I mean?"

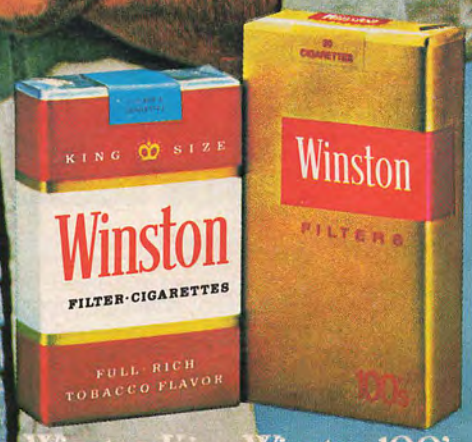
You could see evidence of our aggravation in the scrimmages. Normally we just work on timing, and the defense is just there to give the offense a picture. We're not out to hit hard. But one day Jackie Slater, the offensive tackle,

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KING: 19 mg. "tar", 1.2 mg. nicotine,
100's: 19 mg. "tar", 1.3 mg. nicotine,
av. per cigarette, FTC Report AUG. '77.

Don't tell me taste isn't everything.

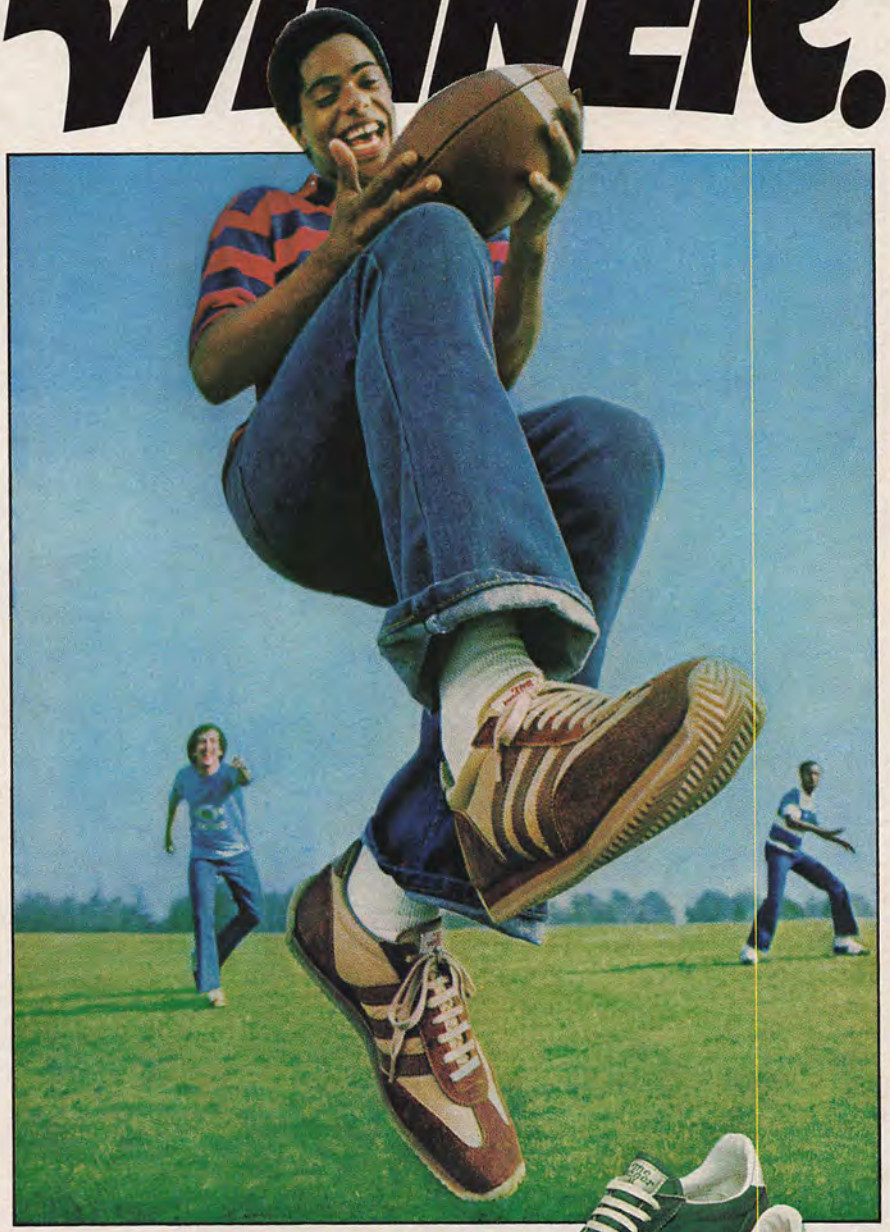
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comes out with blood in his eyes. And he runs at [defensive end] Freddie Dryer, rolls Freddie over and sticks his head in the dirt. Well, Freddie just went crazy. Freddie's a competitor and a *wild* young man. So Freddie made a few nasty statements, then slapped Jackie on the helmet a few times. He told Slater: "Hey, buddy. I'm All-Pro over here, so don't be messing with me too much, you know what I mean?" Those kinds of things happen when the team is frustrated from losing.

I think you win ballgames on defense and we were not playing well defensively early in the season. We had some guys in the lineup who weren't our normal starters. Because Jack Reynolds was in a contract battle, Jimmy Youngblood was moved to middle linebacker and a rookie, Bob Brudzinski, took Jimmy's job at leftside linebacker. Our defenses were structured to protect Brudzinski and Youngblood, which complicated some adjustments for me. Now that Reynolds has been back at middle linebacker for a few weeks, I'm much more confident. We can do some things, based on our experience together, that Jimmy Youngblood and I had been unable to do. And Jimmy has more experience than Bob Brudzinski on the left side, so we're a better-functioning unit.

As to the offense, I agree with the critics. The Rams could be a lot more creative. Our opponents shouldn't expect a run by Lawrence McCutcheon on first down and a pass on third. How are you going to force the other teams to make mistakes unless you put them into situations they haven't dealt with before?

Joe Namath, I believe, was a victim of circumstance. When he was at quarterback, we weren't playing well defensively or offensively. Our timing was off. If we'd been sharp, I believe we would have had great success with Joe as quarterback. But the change from Joe to Pat was necessary at the time it was made. You have to give your best shot for the fans—the people who pay ten to 12 dollars to see you play.

During that shaky start, I began keeping a Wanted List of the NFL's "cheap-shot artists." I put it up in the bulletin board in the lockerroom. Walter Payton was on, but I decided he didn't mean any harm when he clipped our Billy Simpson, he was just into the game. I put Henry Childs on the list; he's the guy who elbowed me in the face. He's still on it. We'll meet again, and he's going to have to be punished.

One of the things I respect most about our coach, Chuck Knox, is that he'd never instigate any unfair violence on the football field. "Go out there and kick somebody's ass," he'll tell us,

"but if you have to take a cheap shot at somebody to win, well, winning ain't that important to me."

The team is gelling now. And in plenty of time. I think the bottom line in football is to play well when you have to. It doesn't matter whether you're 14-0, 12-2 or 10-4. You want to win your division, that's all, and get to the playoffs. We're going to get there. We're all pumped up about that, and so are our fans. I was in the barbershop this morning, getting a shave, and this lady was so pumped up about the Rams—she and the barber were both Ram fans—and they were talking about Sunday's game, getting all crazy, and this guy cut half of one side of my mustache off. He gave me a mirror to look at what he did and I said, "Jesus Christ, either you're kin to Ray Charles or you're cross-eyed."

So I had him cut off my mustache and cut my hair short, too. Sometimes I need a change, a different look.

January 3, 1978

The Rams, indeed, had gelled. After the taping session in the Beverly Hilton lounge, they beat San Francisco and Cleveland and then sacked quarterback Kenny Stabler four times and intercepted him four times to defeat Oakland, the defending Super Bowl champion. It was a victory that, in Isiah's words, "came down to individual pride."

A subsequent win over Atlanta gave the Rams a victory streak of six straight and their fifth consecutive Western Division championship. The four previous titles had led to frustration, with the Rams losing in the playoffs each time. They'd been eliminated by Dallas twice and by Minnesota twice. The '76 Viking loss had been the most disturbing. The Vikings had turned that playoff game around by blocking a Los Angeles fieldgoal attempt and capitalizing on a convenient bounce to run the blocked ball for a 90-yard touchdown. And later, a blocked Ram punt had led to a critical Viking fieldgoal.

But this season, Los Angeles had already mauled the Vikings in a Monday night game, 35-3. Moreover, Viking quarterback Fran Tarkenton was out of the playoffs with an injury. And, finally, this playoff game was scheduled for sunny Southern California, not for Minnesota where freezing temperatures or snow might help equalize the teams.

They played on December 26, with Los Angeles a clear favorite. A week later Isiah sat in his office at his T-shirt company and talked about the game:

I did everything in my power to be ready for that playoff game. I shut down my business. I went into isolation, got





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DOCTORS REPORT: AVERAGE LOSS — 57 POUNDS!

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LOSE UP TO 3 INCHES OFF YOUR THIGHS
LOSE UP TO 4 INCHES OFF YOUR BUTTOCKS
LOSE UP TO 4 INCHES OFF YOUR STOMACH

and as we've said before, starting not in weeks, but in mere days.

HELPS YOUR BODY CONVERT STORED UP FAT TO BURNED UP ENERGY! At this very moment — having read this far — you are but one short step away from LIFETIME IMMUNITY TO FAT! Now comes your FINAL GIANT STEP into a whole new world of LIFETIME SLIMNESS.

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STEP #2 — YOU TAKE "THERA-SLIM-100" hi amino compound.

Once a day, you take "THERA-SLIM-100" in a glass of water, (just like refreshing fruit juice). This hi-amino intake helps keep the fat-burning chain-reaction going ALL 24 HOURS OF THE DAY — NON STOP!

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However, before starting we advise you to consult with your physician to be sure you are in normal health and your only problem is excess weight. Individuals with gout, heart disease, diabetes or pregnant women should not use it at all. As a matter of fact, we insist that you show this entire program to your family physician . . . have him check you regularly to make sure you're not losing too much, too fast . . . and advise when you've lost enough. See if he doesn't agree that the "THERA-SLIM-100" road to Lifetime Slimness, including the recommended progressive daily toneup, isn't by far the most effective approach to the conquest of excess weight ever developed by medical science.

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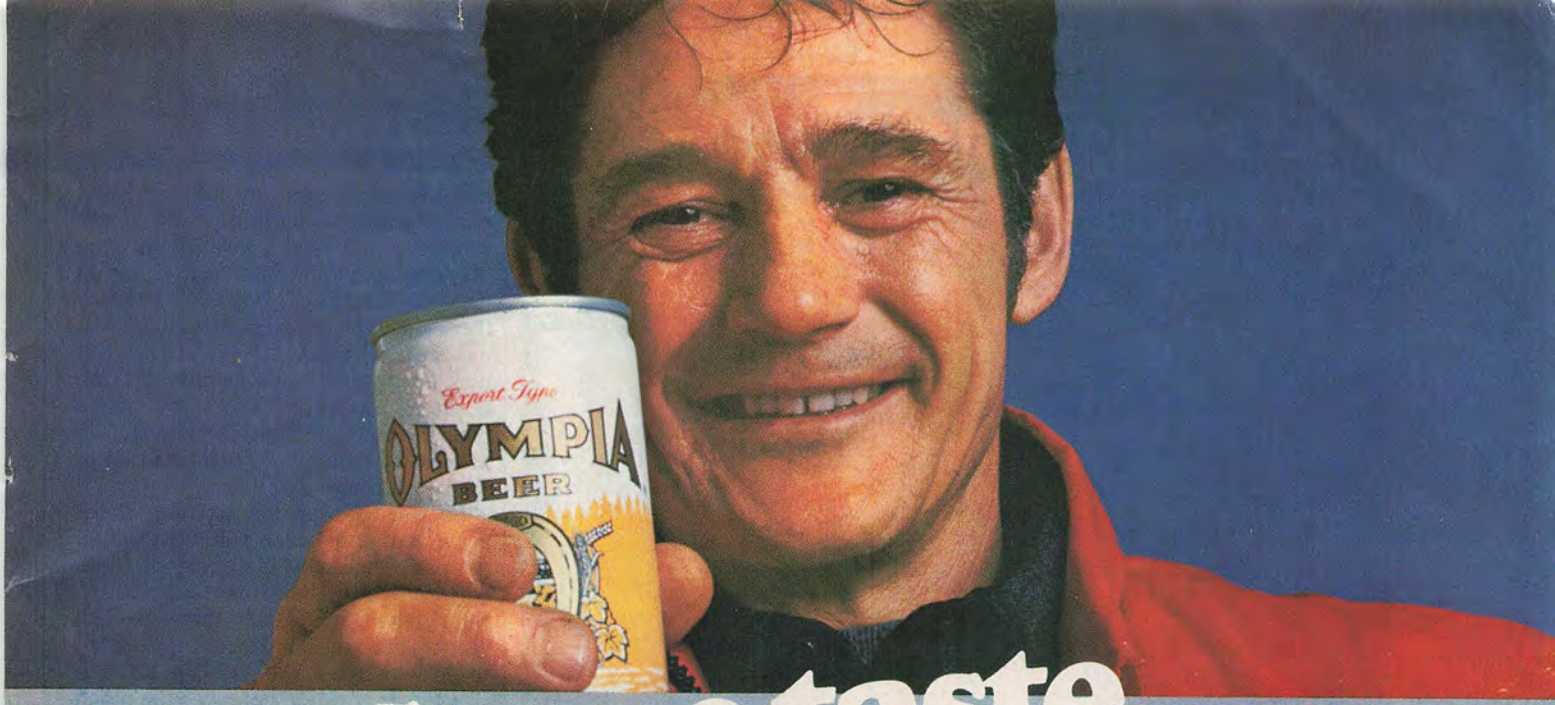
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CONVERSE
THE SHOES OF THE STARS

Rams diary

into my meditation, got into my game preparation. I dedicated all of my energies toward playing well in the playoff game and getting into the next one on the way to the Super Bowl. We all knew there was no way Minnesota could beat us. So it was like, "Hey, M.F., your luck's run out. You ain't gonna block no fieldgoal this time. You ain't gonna block no punt, and you ain't gonna have a 90-yard touchdown with the ball jumping in your face. No way."

So we woke up the morning of the game and, unbelievable, it was raining, pouring. There was the rain. And there was the mud. And Minnesota beat us. Intangibles got us. They threw the ball early, when you could throw it. We tried to throw when it was too late, when it was too wet, when there was too much mud. But it really comes down to one thing. No matter how the defense—including myself—plays, your quarterback *has* to have a good game in the playoffs. Look at Dallas and Denver. The teams that won the playoffs, their quarterbacks, Craig Morton and Roger Staubach, played extremely well. I know the Rams are a better football team than Minnesota. But we had to have a Kenny Stabler kind of quarterback who could pull it out for us. I'm not putting the blame completely on Pat, but I think that if Joe Namath had been healthy, Joe could've done it.

I'm not a man for excuses. So when I saw the rain, I thought, "Okay, they have to play in it, too." I started to get ready for the rain. I began thinking of how I'd maneuver in the rain and got mentally ready to stop Chuck Foreman. He had one good run off-tackle against me, but he didn't catch any passes worth mentioning. Nevertheless, I still feel I played shitty. I didn't contribute a big play like an All-Pro has to in a big playoff game. Now I say to myself, "Oh, man, we blew it again."

I myself wasn't satisfied with my performance this season. Most of the work with the linebackers in our practices was focused on teaching Youngblood and Brudzinski stuff I'd learned years ago. I was frustrated and bored, and I think it showed. But I've learned from that. I know that no matter what the others are doing, I have to be learning and advancing on my own.

My expectations for this season were really high, and I'm let down. But the world doesn't stop. I've done a lot of thinking, reminding myself of perspective. I'm on the board of United Cerebral Palsy and one night, during the season, I got a call from a friend, a young boy with cerebral palsy, who said, "Hey, Isiah, you have to come see me tonight. I'm not going to be here tomorrow." I went to visit my friend. He

died the next day. Yeah, the Super Bowl is important. But in its place.

In the past week I've thought a lot about priorities. I was born in New Orleans and raised in Covington, La., in a very strict Catholic family. But my father ran a nightclub, so there were always two sides to every issue of what was right and what was wrong.

As a little boy, the most important goal was to get married. But between the fast living of football, Beverly Hills and Hollywood, it was easy to forget that and to go for the gusto. I still feel the conflict. I want to get back into the church. I think it's important for me to give back some of my happiness and treasures that the Lord has given me, and that's why I give time to cerebral palsy and coach Little League baseball and run a golf camp for the boy's club. But there's a question: Am I going to live that conservative married lifestyle, or am I going to have a house on a hill full of fine women and be the biggest freak that ever hit California? It won't be hard to be the biggest freak because I've had a lot of experience. But that other life, that would be rough.

February 20, 1978

When rumors spread that the Rams were going to release head coach Chuck Knox and replace him with George Allen, Isiah, who had just been honored with All-Pro recognition again, was publicly critical of the alleged coaching change. When the rumors became fact, Robertson offered up this epilogue to his diary of the Ram season:

I overreacted when I spoke out. I overreacted because I really could relate to Chuck Knox. My first thought was, "If he's gone and you have a problem, who do you go to?" I was in Chuck Knox's office four times a week. But now that I've had time to think about it, I realize that when you are a professional, you just cope with whatever you must.

I think of myself as a professional. Already, I've started working toward the 1978 season. I'm going to be 29 next season and, knowing I'm near the end of my career, I'm more concerned than ever about getting my engine tuned not only for football, but for life. And my engine consists of my mind and my body. So I'm taking three business classes at night, and I quit smoking. So I'm working hard, early. When I go on that football field next year, I'm gonna be strong. I'm gonna knock some people down. Because there's still one more goal. In spite of All-Pro recognition and this year being voted Linebacker of the Year by my peers, one thing remains missing. This year I want a Super Bowl ring. ■

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THE SPORT QUIZ

GRADE YOURSELF
18-20 EXCELLENT
15-17 VERY GOOD
12-14 FAIR

1. Who has appeared in the NBA playoffs the most years (15)?
a. Bill Russell
b. Dolph Schayes
c. John Havlicek

2. Who was the last player to have 200 hits in a season without hitting .300?
a. Lou Brock
b. Ralph Garr
c. Pete Rose

3. When A.J. Foyt won his fourth Indy 500 in 1977, he failed to break the speed record (162.96 mph) set by:
a. Gordon Johncock
b. Johnny Rutherford
c. Mark Donohue

4. Who played for the Baltimore Colts, the Detroit Lions and the Boston Bruins?

5. Which was the last horse to win the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness, but lose the Belmont Stakes?
a. Canonero II
b. Bold Forbes
c. Majestic Prince

6. Who led the majors in grounding into double plays (27) last year?
a. Willie Montanez
b. Rusty Staub
c. Bill Madlock

7. The last tennis player to win singles, doubles and mixed doubles at Wimbledon in the same year was:
a. Billie Jean King
b. Margaret Court
c. Bobby Riggs
d. John Newcombe

8. The last pitcher to win 20 games in one season for a last-place club was:
a. Jim Kaat
b. Steve Carlton
c. Nolan Ryan

9. Who is the all-time leading money-winner (over $556,000) on the pro bowlers' tour?
a. Dick Weber
b. Ray Bluth
c. Earl Anthony

10. In the 1976 Yankee-Red Sox brawl at Yankee Stadium, who was most directly responsible for dislocating Bill Lee's shoulder?
a. Lou Piniella
b. Mickey Rivers
c. Graig Nettles

11. Which of these athletes did *not* attend Ohio State?
a. Larry Hisle
b. Thurman Munson
c. Tom Weiskopf

12. Which of these golfers has never won the PGA?
a. Arnold Palmer
b. Sam Snead
c. Lee Trevino

13. Who has the most career shutouts (including postseason play)?
a. Tom Seaver
b. Bernie Parent
c. Don Sutton

14. Which of the following batters was *not* a "final out" in a perfect game?
a. Harvey Kuenn
b. Cesar Tovar
c. Dale Mitchell

15. After Chicago's Wrigley Field, the oldest ballpark in the National League is:
a. Candlestick Park, San Francisco
b. Dodger Stadium, Los Angeles
c. Busch Stadium, St. Louis

16. When Oakland owner Charlie Finley "fired" second baseman Mike Andrews in the 1973 World Series, who did Finley try to replace him with?
a. Phil Garner
b. Marty Perez
c. Manny Trillo
d. Ted Kubiak

17. Who was the only major-leaguer to be caught stealing *twice* in one inning?
a. Bert Campaneris
b. Don Baylor
c. Rod Carew

18. Which brother combination pitched the most wins (49) in a single season in the majors?
a. Gaylord and Jim Perry
b. Dizzy and Paul Dean
c. Phil and Joe Niekro

19. For which team did Dave Kingman hit the most home runs (11) in 1977?
a. Mets
b. Angels
c. Padres
d. Yankees

20. True or False: No *two* teammates have ever scored as many points in a single NBA game as Wilt Chamberlain did *alone* when he got 100 points on March 2, 1962 against the Knicks.

FOR ANSWERS TURN TO PAGE 112

Arnold Palmer



Sam Snead



Lee Trevino



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FIRST NATIONAL CITY TRAVELERS CHECKS
4

Indy on his mind

by PHILIP SINGERMAN

The fierce competition on auto racing's Championship Trail is all geared toward the Indy 500, says two-time winner Johnny Rutherford—whose goal is to match A.J. Foyt's four visits to victory lane

It is a Thursday morning in March, three days before the first race of the United States Auto Club's 1978 championship-car series, and in a Holiday Inn dining room near the Ontario, Calif. Motor Speedway, Johnny Rutherford, two-time winner of the Indianapolis 500, and his wife Betty sit behind steaming cups of coffee and plates filled with English muffins, eggs and home-fries. Ordinarily, on any day when Rutherford is at the track, either to practice or race, he puts nothing in his stomach until dinner. Even a sip of water during a pit stop, he believes, would alter the taste in his mouth and affect his concentration. But today the chances of Rutherford's getting into a race car are slim, for the torrential rain that has been flooding Southern California for weeks shows no sign of letting up.

If the weather clears tomorrow or Saturday, practice will be curtailed and qualifying runs abbreviated, but the race will be held on Sunday as planned; and while Rutherford would certainly like to test his car in practice, he will not be unduly ruffled if he has to go out on Sunday and race cold. After 19 years of competition he can climb into a race car and, within two or three laps, be driving as fast as he will ever go. If the race is postponed, however, the McLaren team, for whom Rutherford drives, will have to restructure its overall plan for the year. With an annual budget of a million dollars, sponsors who demand results, and $100,000 worth of machinery doing 200 miles an hour or more every time it hits the track, every one of the 18 races in the USAC's championship-car series, called the Championship Trail, is important. But the key to a team's success is the Indianapolis 500, and the course at Ontario, more than any other USAC oval, most resembles Indy.

"The Championship Trail is like a web," says Rutherford. "Everything's hooked together with the center of the thing being Indy. Indy has its own quirks, and you can't really dial the car to its idiosyncracies until you get there for the three weeks of practice before the race on Memorial Day. But you're still thinking Indy all the time, and Ontario will let you know whether your machine is sorted out for the 500, or whether major changes are in order."

Johnny is sure he and his champ car will break the track record during qualifying runs for the Indianapolis 500 this year.

Rutherford cleans the last of the potatoes from his plate. He is wearing Levi's, a red-and-white checked shirt and black cowboy boots. He is a handsome man who looks no more than 30, although his 40th birthday is only a few days away. His features are strong and chiseled, his jaw determined, blue eyes clear and watchful. Even in repose, there is a tautness about him, as though he is in a state of constant isometric contraction. He stands 5 feet 11, weighs around 180 pounds and has, from countless miles of bulldogging a race car, the powerful sloping shoulders of a prizefighter.

The waitress offers more coffee and Rutherford shakes his head. "What I would really like to have," he says, "is a nice milkshake."

"J.R., we just ate breakfast," says Betty, effectively canceling the order. She is a strikingly beautiful woman who seems as strong-willed and forceful as he. Her tailored pants suit, jewelry and makeup reveal taste and understatement.

"This isn't breakfast," he says, "it's brunch. I could use a milkshake."

"That's exactly what you couldn't use," says Betty, staring at the incipient potbelly above Rutherford's belt.

Johnny rolls her a long sideways glance and says, "Want me to show this writer how a race-car driver knocks his wife across the room?" The sideways glance rolls in my direction. "Print that, boy, and I'll keeel ya."

"Johnny wouldn't hurt a fly," Betty says to me. I'm totally convinced that Rutherford would never lay a hand on his wife, but I'm not so sure about the fly. Rutherford's a man you would want on your side, not as an adversary.

"C'mon," Rutherford says, "let's ride over to the track."

A half hour later I'm standing in the doorway of a rain-splattered metal garage, one of the two occupied by the McLaren racing team, watching five crewmen move noiselessly about the garage arranging tools and straightening the equipment on a steel workbench. All five men wear blue-and-white Adidas sneakers, immaculate flared Levi's, white Goodyear shirts, dark-blue crewneck sweaters and blue Goodyear caps. They are in their mid to late 20s and are remarkably proficient technicians.

"All of the top crews are within three or four seconds of each other on a pit stop," Rutherford says, "but three or four seconds is a long time when you're running as close as we do; and no other crew is faster than mine."

McLaren Engineering is one of the few teams whose sole business is racing, and this commitment has meshed with Rutherford's like two perfectly mated gears. "I always maintained," he says, "that if I found a team that wanted to go racing as badly as I did, I'd have a winner; that if I could finish Indy, I'd either win it or be in the top three." In five years with McLaren, he's finished Indy three times—twice in first place (1974 and '76) and once in second (1975).

One of two chief mechanics, Steve Roby, a scholarly-looking man of 29 with dark hair and horn-rimmed glasses, comes over to me. He says that McLaren Engineering, based in England where the cars are built, employs three drivers: James Hunt, the flamboyant Englishman, and Patrick Tambay, a Frenchman, run on the Formula 1, or Grand Prix, circuit; Johnny Rutherford handles the USAC oval tracks. The championship car that Rutherford drives looks almost the same as a Formula 1 machine, but at 1,500 pounds is 300 pounds heavier. Its Cosworth V-8 engine, constructed of magnesium and aluminum, is turbocharged and puts out 900 horsepower, compared to 480 from Cosworths used in Formula 1, and the champ car must be more finely balanced.

"In a Formula 1 race," Roby says, "the drivers thrash the cars around more. They're going up hills, down hills, around lefthand hairpins and right-

Rutherford



Betty Rutherford (above) joined her husband for the postrace celebration after he won the 500 for a second time in '76.

hand curves and can compensate more for their machines. In a champ car, the margin of error is much smaller because they're constantly running so close together at such high speeds."

Roby stares out at the rain and shakes his head. "Hope you get to see Johnny race on Sunday," he says. "He's damn quick at a track like this. He'll come down that straightaway at 230 miles an hour. Ontario's like Indy; high and wide is best, and that's John's forte. No one runs closer to the outside than him. At Indy they've got the wall painted white and he's come into the pits with his right-rear tire white-walled."

Over in a corner of the garage, Rutherford stands talking to a tall, straight-backed man of late middle age wearing a Goodyear windbreaker. The man is introduced to me as Herb Porter, Rutherford's "dad in racing." Fifteen years ago Johnny drove a dirt-track car in the Midwest for Herb, who now designs test engines for Goodyear, and who was instrumental in getting Rutherford together with McLaren.

"Herb thinks like an engine," says Rutherford. Their conversation, however, is not about engines but about planes. Rutherford owns two P-51 Mustangs, one based near his home in Fort Worth, Tex., which he flies, the other presently being restored at the Chino, Calif. Airport a few miles down the road. John and Betty decide to drive to Chino and see how the plane is coming.

"I'm a contract driver," Rutherford tells me on the way to the airport. "I'm paid a retainer and a percentage of my winnings." The only car Johnny ever owned and raced was his first one, a chopped-down '32 Chevy coupe with no fenders and a V-8 Chevrolet engine he built and ran in 1959 at the Devil's Bowl Speedway in Dallas. In 1960, with one year of experience, he went into the Midwest with Jim McElreath, who also became a famous champ-car driver, and started racing sprint cars full time. "I can't say I was real successful right off," he says, "but I made enough for food and traveling expenses to the races. I got no encouragement from home; my mother called me a racetrack bum. But I was determined to be a racecar driver from the time I was a little boy."

Rutherford got his first ride in the Midwest by walking up to the pit gate before the first sprint race of the season and asking if anyone had a car with no driver. A man with a pink-and-white car said, "I'm supposed to have a driver here but if he doesn't show . . . you stick around."

The driver never showed up, Rutherford got his start and wound up racing the pink-and-white car for the rest of the season. "That's why," he says, "it's hard for me to understand a youngster today who doesn't have the guts—or whatever it takes—to walk up to an owner at a sprint-car track, or a midget or modified track, and say, 'Let me drive your car.' Maybe it's because young drivers nowadays all want to start at the top. I know my younger brother, who's 29, wants to race very badly and he's been at it off and on for around ten years. But he doesn't want to sacrifice and do the things that I had to do to work my way up the ladder."

By 1962 it seemed as though Rutherford's climb up the ladder would be supersonic. He was leading the point standings of the International Motor

Contest Association (IMCA, the sprint-car sanctioning body), was offered a champ-car ride and switched to USAC for the last three races of the season. Then in January 1963 an acquaintance in Texas got him a stock-car ride with Smokey Yunick at Daytona Beach. It was the first time Rutherford raced a NASCAR-type stocker, but he set a single-lap qualifying record of 165.183 miles an hour, and then went on to win one of the 100-mile qualifying races. That earned him an invitation to drive at Indianapolis. "I was a green, inexperienced kid as far as high-speed racing was concerned, but I *wanted* to go to Indianapolis."

Johnny qualified at Indy in a car that had also been driven by Lloyd Ruby, one of the all-time Indy greats, who told Rutherford: "This car'll take a hell of a set [glues itself to the track] in the corner. When it does, just plant your right foot [on the accelerator] and steer it and you'll qualify. Besides, we gotta have all us Texans in the race."

"That was enough for me," says Johnny. In the 500, the car's transmission let go after 43 laps, but he had made it to Indy.

Rutherford passed up an opportunity to drive for Yunick in NASCAR and for the next couple of years raced sprint cars every weekend to supplement his USAC earnings. In 1965 he won the sprint-car title, picked up a first-rate championship-car ride and seemed on the brink of stardom. Then at a track in El Dora, Ohio, in April 1966, Johnny flipped his sprint car over the wall, broke both arms, suffered a severe concussion and spent almost a month in a Dayton hospital.

"When I saw the headlines, 'Rutherford out for season,' " he recalls, "I knew it would be five years before I gained back the ground I'd lost, because after a crash like that a lot of drivers won't take the chances you have to take to be up front, and car owners know this. They think, 'That boy *used* to be real quick, but is he still?' I had to work my way back with lesser cars until I got a break again."

The break came in 1970 when Rutherford went to Indianapolis with a new, wedge-shaped racer. In the weeks before the 500, everything his team did to adjust the car's handling seemed to make it run slower and slower.

"Then," Rutherford remembers, "just before qualifying, we went back to baseline, began tuning the suspension in the opposite direction and started going faster. We lost the pole position to Al Unser by one-hundredth of a second—one-eight-thousandth of a mile an hour—and the place went crazy. It was a real darkhorse, underdog kind of thing. That was the turning point in my comeback because I could go fast at the Speedway and sit in the front row."

Now, in addition to his champ-car ride with McLaren, Rutherford drives a Porsche 935 in endurance races for a California car dealer named Dick Barbour, and a midget for an old-time driver and builder named Doug Caruthers. I ask him which car he enjoys most. "I'd have to say the champ car," he says, then smiles and looks a little wistful. "To tell you the truth," he continues, "the shorter the racetrack and the more 'bull-ringy' it is, the better I like it. In fact, I think I'd enjoy racing midgets indoors very much because that's a push-shove, take advantage, move quick, brake-throttle, jump outside-inside kind of racing and I like that. At high speeds in the champ car I can do that very well—I can dice and move. But in an Indy car, at 200 miles an hour, you gotta be cautious because things happen a lot faster than in a midget."

All of this takes superlative reaction time and remarkable powers of concentration, and in both these departments Rutherford is an acknowledged master. Yet as he comes barrel-housing down the straight at Indy, he'll occasionally look at the Goodyear blimp drifting overhead, watch a plane approach the nearby airport or enjoy the aroma of a barbecue. I remind Johnny that Stirling Moss was reputed to have made dates with women spectators as he drove by during a race, albeit in a somewhat slower car. "You can spot a beautiful woman in a crowd at any speed," Rutherford says.

Rutherford: "You can spot a beautiful woman in a crowd at any speed"

As we follow the narrow road into the airport, I ask Rutherford whether he can continue champ-car racing much longer. "I do," he says. "High-speed driving has a very long learning curve, which is why some of the best drivers at Indy are older. [Bobby Unser is 44, his brother Al, 39; four-time 500 winner A.J. Foyt is 43.] A young driver will make mistakes, which is *gaining* experience to go fast; an old race driver *relies* on experience to go fast."

Eight privately owned military planes—warbirds, as they're called—sit in the hangar in various states of disassembly. There are four P-51 Mustangs, an F-86 Saber-jet, an F-84, a B.T.13 and an F-80 Bearcat. What a fantasy, I think. The ultimate adult toy: your very own fighter plane cruising the skies. Zapzapzapzzzap.

Johnny Rutherford's passion for warbirds began when he was a child, coexisting with his desire to become a race driver. And now the money he has earned as a racer has enabled him to consummate that love affair with fighter planes. As he stands under the wing of his Mustang in his World War II, leather Navy flight jacket, talking to Bruce Goessling, head of the restoring aircraft company, Rutherford is relaxed, the tension in his face replaced by pride. On being told how well the restoration is progressing, he grins broadly.

We leave the hangar and head back to the Holiday Inn over rain-swamped roads. At the motel, Betty phones the Rutherford's two children, John IV, ten, and Angela, seven, while Johnny stretches out on a bed and I ask him what's ahead.

"Right now I'm trying to secure the future for myself and my family so when I quit this racket I can turn my back on it and walk away," he replies. "I don't want to keep driving after the time I should stop, just to pay the rent, so there are business arrangements I'm investigating, and the TV series I'm filming [15 episodes called *The Racers*], and the television commercials Betty and I do, and the personal appearances . . . and, of course, racing."

"When will you stop racing?" I ask.

"When climbing into a race car is no longer any fun," he says. I mention a newspaper article I read quoting him as having thought of quitting after an accident in 1966 and again in 1972 after he was burned in a crash at Milwaukee. "Never!" John exclaims. "There was never any thought of quitting; but after a driver named Don Branson, who was a dear friend and mentor of mine, was killed in a race, I did question the end result of what I was doing. I wondered whether I was climbing the mountain to stand on the peak or merely to fall off a cliff on the other side."

"While you're racing, do you ever think about what could happen on the track?" I wonder.

"Oh yes," he answers. "I'll be going particularly fast coming into a curve and think, 'What if that right wheel came off?' Man, what a crash that would be! I think we all have thoughts like that."

It is approaching dinnertime so I ask Johnny what is on the agenda for the evening. Tyler Alexander, the director of McLaren U.S.A. is taking the team out to dinner, I'm told. "I think seeing you all together would give me some good material for the story," I say. "Can I join you?"

"It's not my dinner party," responds



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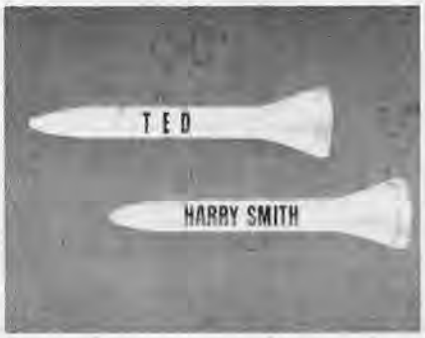
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Rutherford

Rutherford. He says it without rancor or malice, but simply to let me know that a line has been drawn.

"I'll see you in the morning," I say.

'If it's raining we'll have breakfast," he replies. "Otherwise we'll go straight to the track."

On Friday it is still raining intermittently so I meet John and Betty in the dining room. Danny Ongais and Johnny Parsons, two up-and-coming USAC stars, are also there and Rutherford greets them warmly. They talk across the room for a few minutes about the weather, and all agree that the race will most likely be postponed. "I had hope," says Rutherford, "until I saw some animals coming up the road two by two." Then he turns to me. "So," he says, "what kind of a story are you planning to write?" I tell him for the second time that what I'd like to do is an in-depth profile but feel somewhat hamstrung because of the previous night. "Listen," he says. "You have to understand that this isn't a weekend club-racing proposition we're engaged in. This is strictly business and the stakes are very high. There are dozens of little secrets we have and when I'm out with Tyler or the mechanics and we're talking about the car, there's information that could get out and help our competition."

We drive out to the track, and for a while the rain stops. But just as Rutherford settles into his cockpit and pulls on his helmet with the flag of Texas painted on top, the rain returns and we all scurry back to the garages. A voice comes over the track's loudspeaker canceling practice for the day; and I spend the next two hours watching the McLaren crew remove the practice engine from the race car and install the one to be used for qualifying and racing—just in case.

On Saturday the rain continues, the race is officially postponed until later in the month, and within hours nearly all the stockers and champ-car teams have left Ontario. Ironically, two drivers who must remain are Rutherford and Gordon Johncock, fierce rivals on the Championship Trail. Both men will run tire tests on Tuesday if the weather clears. On several occasions when their paths have crossed since Thursday, the two men have cut each other dead, the result of a confrontation last year after a race in Phoenix. Johncock accused Rutherford of trying to run him off the track and threw two punches at Johnny in the press trailer. Rutherford, a former Golden Gloves boxer, did not retaliate. Now, as we sit in his room late Sunday morning, he is reluctant to discuss the incident. He does admit that Johncock believes that the bad blood between them is long standing, but scoffs at rumors of a feud. "As far as I'm con-



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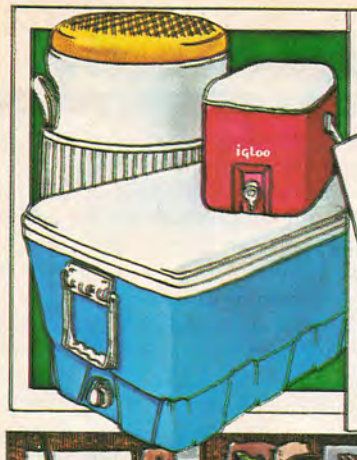
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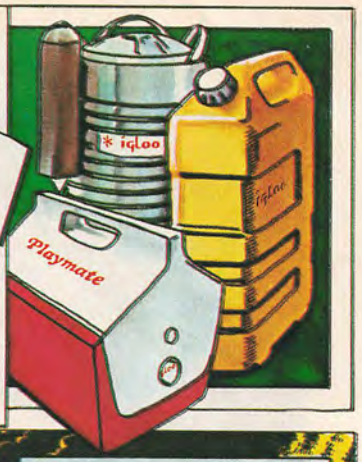
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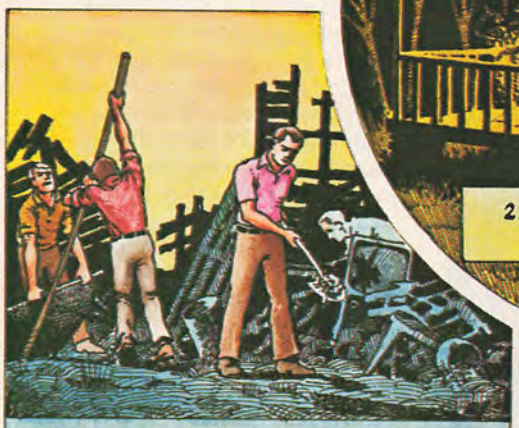


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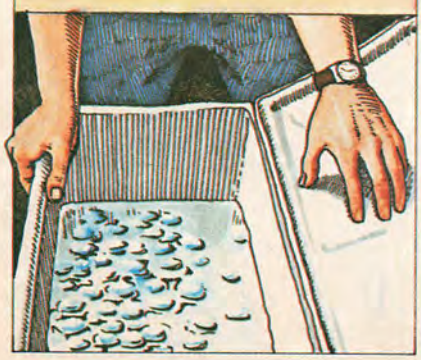


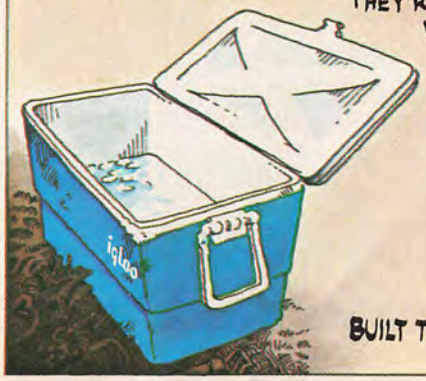
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cerned," Rutherford says, "it was simply a matter of two hard-charging drivers going for the same hole at the same time. I sure don't hold a grudge against Gordie and I don't think talking about it will add anything to your story. Ask me about something else."

"You've won Indy twice," I say. "Do you have any more goals in auto racing?"

"A.J. Foyt's won Indy four times," Rutherford replies. "So I'm shooting for that. But foremost is the National USAC Championship, which I've never taken. Having that No. 1 on my car would give me a great amount of satisfaction."

I look over at Rutherford reclining on the bed, at his hands covered with a network of scar tissue from burns, at the accident-damaged right arm he can no longer fully extend, and marvel at the sheer force of will that propels him to continue. In July 1974 he broke his left leg racing. Why does he do it? I wonder. "It's an unfortunate truth about life," he says, "that those things that mean the most to you are often unexplainable. I can't tell you why."

I recall what Rutherford had said about driving at the Speedway: "Indy is a place you can never take for granted because that's when she'll turn her back on you and leave you in the cold." Then I ask Rutherford about the one-lap Indy record he set during his qualifying runs in 1973 (199.071) that was broken last year by the '77 Indy runnerup, the USAC national champion, Tom Sneva (200.535). "Do you think you can ever get back your lap record at the Speedway?" I ask.

"Oh yes," he says. "I'm sure I'll set a new track record this year." ■

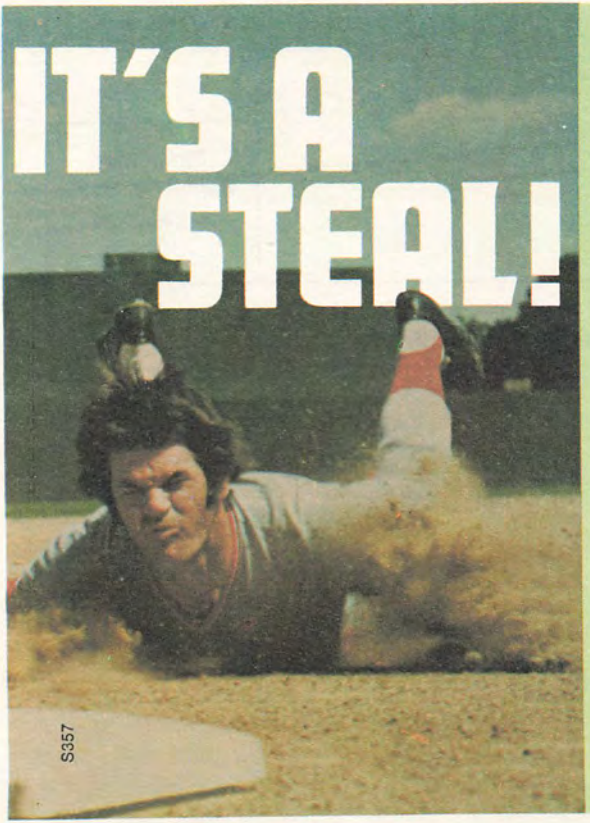
THE SPORT QUIZ

ANSWERS
from page 102

1—b. 2—b., 1973. He hit .299. 3—c., 1972. 4—author George Plimpton. 5—a., 1971. 6—c. 7—a., 1973. 8—c., 1974 Angels. 9—c. 10—c. 11—b. 12—a. 13—b. 14—b. 15—a. 16—c. 17—b. 18—b., St. Louis Cardinals, 1934. Dizzy won 30. 19—c. 20—True.

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